Galaxy®

February 1965
60¢

ON THE
STORM PLANET
by
CORDWAINER
SMITH

THE MAN WHO
ILLED IMMORTALS
by
J. T. McINTOSH

PLANET OF
FORGETTING
by
AMES H. SCHMITZ

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AMAZING INTRODUCTORY OFFER FROM ONE OF AMERICA'S LARGEST PHOTO FINISHERS AND CAMERA MANUFACTURERS!

FREE CAMERA

WITH BUILT-IN FLASH— PRE-FOCUSED LENS— NECK STRAP & INSTRUCTION BOOKLET!

(RETAIL VALUE $10.95)

Plus FREE MEMBERSHIP IN THE *THRIFTEE* FILM CLUB!

YOU PAY ONLY FOR FILM AND PROCESSING! YOU GET THE CAMERA FREE — PLUS FREE MEMBERSHIP IN THE THRIFTEE FILM CLUB!

Imagine! Here's what you get . . .

Commander Camera	Retail Value:	$10.95
1 Roll Kodacolor Film	Retail Value:	1.25
1 Roll Kodak Black-and-White Film	Retail Value:	.55
Pre-paid Processing Certificate (Good for 12 Jumbo Color Prints and 1 new fresh roll of Kodacolor Film!)	Retail Value:	5.15
		$17.90

YOU PAY ONLY $6.95...YOU SAVE $10.95!

Plus **MEMBERSHIP IN THRIFTEE FILM CLUB! SAVES YOU HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS!**

- ★ **FREE FILM FOR LIFE (with every roll processed)!**
- ★ **FREE THRIFTEE BONUS COUPONS** redeemable for **FREE** movie cameras, **FREE** enlargements, **FREE** projection screens — and dozens of other **FREE** gifts!
- ★ **DISCOUNTS UP TO 40%** on all your photo needs!
- ★ **JUMBO PRINTS** at **NO EXTRA CHARGE!**
- ★ **FREE CREDIT COUPONS** for pictures that don't print!

ACT NOW — TO GET YOUR FREE CAMERA! Supply limited! Clip coupon and mail today!

THRIFTEE FILM CLUB!

Division of FORE FOTO, P. O. Box 1191, Long Island City, New York 11101

Sensational new COMMANDER camera — a $10.95 value — yours absolutely FREE! Here is the easiest camera to use! Just aim and press the button — you can't make mistakes! Nothing to focus! Nothing to set or adjust! No double exposures! You get crisp, sharp black-and-whites, amazingly life-like color shots — even slides — with no effort at all!

RUSH COUPON TODAY!

THRIFTEE FILM CLUB, Div. of Fore Foto,
c/o GALAXY PUB. CORP.
P.O. Box 102, N.Y., N.Y. 10014

RUSH my FREE CAMERA to me at once! Also tell me how I can receive other valuable FREE GIFTS from THRIFTEE!

Also send me 1 roll of KODACOLOR Film, 1 roll of KODAK black-and-white film and 1 pre-paid processing certificate (redeemable for 12 FULL COLOR JUMBO PRINTS and 1 new fresh roll of Kodacolor film at no extra charge). Total retail value: $17.90. I pay only $6.95 plus 25¢ handling.

NAME _____
(please print)

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

☐ Send C.O.D. I am enclosing $2.00 deposit and will pay postman $4.95, plus 25¢ handling, plus postal charges.

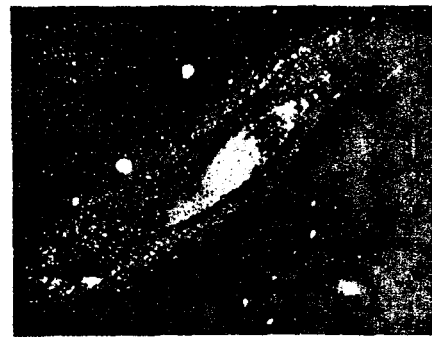
☐ I want to save postal charges. I am enclosing $6.95, plus 25¢ for handling.

MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE! Your money refunded in full if you are not completely pleased!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Galaxy
MAGAZINE

ALL STORIES NEW



Galaxy is published in French and Italian. The U. S. Edition is published in Braille. This Edition is also published in Living Tape by Blind, Inc., Des Moines, Iowa.

FEBRUARY, 1965 ● Vol. 23, No. 3

CONTENTS

COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL

ON THE STORM PLANET 6
by Cordwainer Smith

NOVELETTES

THE MAN WHO KILLED IMMORTALS .. 110
by J. T. McIntosh

PLANET OF FORGE 160
by James H. Schmitz

SHORT STORIES

A FLASK OF FINE ARCTURIAN 80
by C. C. MacApp

THE SIXTH PALACE 99
by Robert Silverberg

HARRY PROTAGONIST, BRAIN-DRAINER 139
by Richard Wilson

FIN'S FUNERAL 142
by Donald H. Menzel

SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

FOR YOUR INFORMATION 87
by Willy Ley

FEATURES

EDITORIAL 4
by Frederik Pohl

GALAXY BOOKSHELF 153
by Algis Budrys

FORECAST 194

Cover by WRIGHT for PLANET OF FORGETTING

FREDERIK POHL
Editor

WILLY LEY
Science Editor

DIANE SULLIVAN
Associate Editor

SOL COHEN
Publisher

DAVID PERTON
Production Manager

DAVE GELLER ASSOC.
Advertising

MAVIS FISHER
Subscription Mgr.

GALAXY MAGAZINE is published bi-monthly by Galaxy Publishing Corporation. Main offices: 421 Hudson Street, New York 14, N. Y. 60c per copy Subscription: (6 copies) $3.00 per year in the United States, Canada, Mexico, South and Central America and U. S. Possessions. Elsewhere $3.50. Second-class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. **Copyright New York 1965** by Galaxy Publishing Corporation, Robert M. Guinn, President. All rights including translations reserved. All material submitted must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelopes. The publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited material. All stories printed in this magazine are fiction and any similarity between characters and actual persons is coincidental.
Printed in the U.S.A.
By The Guinn Co., Inc. N. Y.
Title Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fred Hoyle Revisited

The astronomer Fred Hoyle, for whom the undersigned has shared with many other science-fiction fans a very special interest (see Algis Budrys's column in this issue), has always struck us as A Man to Keep an Eye On. You never know what he is going to come up with next. He not only thinks like a science-fiction writer; he even writes like a science-fiction writer. He writes, in fact, both science-fiction (*The Black Cloud, Ossian's Ride*, etc.) and now the sort of extrapolative not-quite-fact that is sometimes called "non-fiction science fiction".

No doubt the sort of thing that Fred Hoyle will ultimately be measured by is whether some of his grander attempts to explain the beginnings of everything, such as his Steady-State theory of the permanent process of creation of matter and the revision of Einstein's laws he proposed a few months ago in London, turn out to meet the tests of prediction and observation. In a way, this is a pity. He is doing something quite apart from those things, and doing it very well. He is writing books like *Of Men and Galaxies*, just published by the University of Washington Press.

Says Hoyle: "My experience with scientific problems, in particular those in astronomy, is that where alternative possibilities exist it is never the possibility that leads to a dead end, the possibility that lacks interesting consequences, that turns out to be correct. It seems to be an overriding feature of all physical laws that they become more elegant, simpler in a way, as we get to know them better, but that their consequences become more varied and complex." This is "science-fiction writer thinking" if we ever heard any—imagine choosing among alternative astrophysical theories on the basis of which one is going to be the most fun—and what makes it most dear to our hearts is that, for Fred Hoyle at least, it clearly works.

Interesting book. Interesting man. Wonder how we can go about getting him to write for *Galaxy* . . . —THE EDITOR

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

These great minds were Rosicrucians . . .

WHAT SECRET POWER DID THEY POSSESS?

Benjamin Franklin

Isaac Newton

Francis Bacon

Why were these men great?

How does anyone — man or woman — achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

Know the mysterious world within you! Attune yourself to the wisdom of the ages! Grasp the inner power of your mind! Learn the secrets of a full and peaceful life!

Benjamin Franklin, statesman and inventor... Isaac Newton, discoverer of the Law of Gravitation . . . Francis Bacon, philosopher and scientist . . . like many other learned and great men and women . . . were Rosicrucians. The Rosicrucians (NOT a religious organization) have been in existence for centuries. Today, headquarters of the Rosicrucians send over seven million pieces of mail annually to all parts of the world.

The ROSICRUCIANS

San Jose (AMORC) California, U.S.A.

THIS BOOK FREE!

Write for your FREE copy of "The Mastery of Life" — TODAY. No obligation. A non-profit organization. Address: Scribe Y.C.A.

SEND THIS COUPON

Scribe Y.C.A.
The ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC)
San Jose, California, U.S.A.

Please send me the *free* book, *The Mastery of Life*, which explains how I may learn to use my faculties and powers of mind.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____

State_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On the Storm Planet

BY CORDWAINER SMITH

ILLUSTRATED BY FINLAY

Underpeople can't give orders to humans. But this girl was not only an underperson — she was immensely, frighteningly more!

I

"At two seventy-five in the morning," said the Administrator to Casher O'Neill, "you will kill this girl with a knife. At two seventy-seven, a fast ground car will pick you up and bring you back here. Then the power cruiser will be yours. Is that a deal?"

He held out his hand as if he wanted Casher O'Neill to shake it then and there, making some kind of an oath or bargain.

Casher did not slight the man, so he picked up his glass and said, "Let's drink to the deal first."

The Administrator's quick, restless, darting eyes looked Casher up and down very sus-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

piciously. The warm sea-wet air blew through the room. The Administrator seemed wary, suspicious, alert, but underneath his slight hostility there was another emotion, of which Casher could perceive just the edge. Fatigue with its roots in bottomless despair? Despair set deep in irrecoverable fatigue?

That other emotion, which Casher could barely discern, was very strange indeed. On all his voyages back and forth through the inhabited worlds, Casher had met many odd types of men and women. He had never seen anything like this Administrator before — brilliant, erratic, boastful. His title was "Mr. Commissioner" and he was an ex-Lord of the Instrumentality.

Though no longer a Lord, he nevertheless represented the Instrumentality on this planet of Henriada, where the population had dropped from six hundred million persons down to some forty thousand. Indeed, local government had disappeared into limbo and this odd man, with the title of "Administrator", was the only law and civil authority which the planet knew.

Nevertheless, he had a surplus power cruiser and Casher O'Neill was determined to get that cruiser as a part of his long plot to return to his home planet of Mizzer and to unseat the usurper, Colonel Wedder.

The Administrator stared sharply, wearily at Casher and then he, too, lifted his glass. The green twilight colored his liquor and made it seem like some strange poison. It was only Earth-byegarr, though a little on the strong side.

With a sip, only a sip, the older man relaxed a little. "You may be out to trick me, young man. You may think I am an old fool running an abandoned planet. You may even be thinking that killing this girl is some kind of a crime. It is not a crime at all. I am the Administrator of Henriada and I have ordered that girl killed every year for the last eighty years. She isn't even a girl, to start with. Just an underperson. Some kind of an animal turned into a domestic servant. I can appoint you a deputy sheriff, if you like. Or chief of detectives. That might be better. I haven't had a chief of detectives for a hundred years and more. You are my chief of detectives. Go in tomorrow. The house is not hard to find. It's the biggest and best house left on this planet. Go in tomorrow morning. Ask for her master and be sure that you use the correct title, 'Mister and Owner Murray Madigan.' The robots will tell

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you to keep out. If you persist, she will come to the door. That's when you will stab her through the heart, right there in the doorway. My ground car will race up one metric minute later. You jump in and come back here We've been through this before. Why don't you agree? Don't you know who I am?"

"I know perfectly well," smiled Casher O'Neill, "who you are, Mr. Commissioner and Administrator. You are the honorable Rankin Meiklejohn, once of Earth Two. After all, the Instrumentality itself gave me a permit to land on this planet on private business. They knew who *I* was, too, and what I wanted. There's something funny about all this. Why should you give me a power cruiser — the best ship, you yourself say, in your whole fleet — just for killing one modified animal which looks and talks like a girl? Why me? Why the visitor? Why the man from off-world? Why should you care whether this particular underperson is killed or not? If you've given the order for her death eighty times in eighty years, why hasn't it been carried out long ago? Mind you, Mr. Administrator, I'm not saying no. I want that cruiser very much indeed. But what's the deal? What's the trick? Is it the house you want?"

"Beauregard? No, I don't want Beauregard. Old Madigan can rot in it for all I care. It's between Ambiloxi and Mottile, on the Gulf of Esperanza. You can't miss it. The road is good. You could drive yourself there."

"What is it, then?" Casher's voice had an edge of persistence to it.

The Administrator's response was singular indeed. He filled his huge inhaler-glass with the potent byegarr. He stared over the full glass at Casher O'Neill as if he were an enemy. He drained the glass. Casher knew that that much liquor, taken suddenly, could kill the normal human being.

The Administrator did not fall over dead.

He did not even become noticeably more drunk.

His face turned red and his eyes almost popped out, as the harsh 160-proof liquor took effect, but he still did not say anything. He just stared at Casher. Casher, who had learned in his long exile to play many games, just stared back.

The Administrator broke first.

He leaned forward and burst into a birdlike shriek of laughter. The laughter went on and on until it seemed that the man had hogged all the merriment in the galaxy. Casher snorted a little

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

laugh along with the man, more out of nervous reflex than anything else, but he waited for the Administrator to stop laughing.

The Administrator finally got control of himself. With a broad grin and a wink at Casher, he poured four fingers more of the byegarr into his glass, drank it down as if it were a sip of cream, and then — only very lightly unsteady — stood up, came over and patted Casher on the shoulder.

"You're a smart boy, my lad. I'm cheating you. I don't care whether the power cruiser is there or not. I'm giving you something which has no value at all to me. Who's ever going to take a power cruiser off this planet? It's ruined. It's abandoned. And so am I. Go ahead, you can have the cruiser for nothing. Just take it, free. Unconditionally."

This time it was Casher who leaped to his feet and stared down into the face of the feverish, wanton little man.

"Thank you, Mr. Administrator!" he cried, trying to catch the hand of the Administrator to seal the deal.

Rankin Meiklejohn looked awfully sober for a man with that much liquor in him. He held his right hand behind his back and would not shake.

"You can have the cruiser all right. *But kill that girl first!* Just as a favor to me."

"Why?" said Casher, his voice loud and cold, trying to wring some sense out of the chattering man.

"Just — just — just because I say so," stammered the Administrator.

"Why?" said Casher, cold and loud again.

The liquor suddenly took over inside the Administrator. He groped back for the arm of his chair, sat down suddenly and then looked up at Casher. He was very drunk indeed. The strange emotion, the elusive fatigue-despair, had vanished from his face. He spoke straightforwardly. Only the excessive care of his articulation would have shown a passer-by that he was drunk.

"Because, you fool," said Meiklejohn, "those people, more than eighty in eighty years, that I have sent to Beauregard with orders to kill the girl. Those people — " he repeated, and stopped speaking, clamping his lips together.

"What happened to them?" asked Casher calmly.

The Administrator grinned. "I don't know what happened," said the Administrator. "For the life of me, I don't know. Not one of them ever came back."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What happened to them? Did she kill them?" cried Casher.

"How would I know?" said the drunken man, getting visibly more sleepy.

"Why didn't you report it?"

This seemed to rouse the Administrator. "Report that one little girl had stopped me, the planetary Administrator? Just one little girl, and not even a human being! They would have sent help, and laughed at me. By the Bell, young man. I've been laughed at enough! I need no help from outside. You're going in there tomorrow morning at two seventy-five, with a knife. And a ground car waiting."

He stared fixedly at Casher and then suddenly fell asleep in his chair. Casher called to the robots to show him to his room; they tended to the master as well.

II

The next morning at two seventy-five sharp, nothing happened. Casher walked down the baroque corridor, looking into beautiful barren rooms. All the doors were open.

Through one door he heard a sick, deep bubbling snore.

It was the Administrator, sure enough. He lay twisted in his bed. A small nursing machine beside him, her white enameled body only slightly rusty. She held up a mechanical hand for silence and somehow managed to make the gesture seem light, delicate and pretty, even from a machine.

Casher walked lightly back to his own room, where he ordered hotcakes, bacon and coffee. He studied a tornado through the armored glass of his window while the robots prepared his food. The elastic trees clung to the earth with a fury which matched the fury of the wind. The trunk of the tornado reached like the nose of a mad elephant down into the gardens, but the flora fought back. A few animals whipped upward and out of sight. The tornado then came straight for the house, but did not damage it outside of making a lot of noise.

"We have two or three hundred of those a day," said a butler robot. "That is why we store all spacecraft underground and have no weather machines. It would cost more, the people said, to make this planet livable than the planet could possibly yield. The radio and news are in the library, sir. I do not think that the honorable Rankin Meiklejohn will wake until evening, say seven-fifty or eight o'clock."

"Can I go out?"

"Why not, sir? You are a true man. You do what you wish."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I mean, is it safe for me to go out?"

"Oh, no, sir! The wind would tear you apart or carry you away."

"Don't people ever go out?"

"Yes, sir. With ground cars or with automatic body armor. I have been told that if it weighs fifty tons or better, the person inside is safe. I would not know, sir. As you see, I am a robot. I was made here, though my brain was formed on Earth Two. I have never been outside this house."

Casher looked at the robot. This one seemed unusually talkative. He chanced the opportunity of getting some information.

"Have you ever heard of Beauregard?"

"Yes, sir. It is the best house on this planet. I have heard people say that it is the solidest building on Henriada. It belongs to the Mister and Owner Murray Madigan. He is an Old North Australian, a renunciant who left his home planet and came here when Henriada was a busy world. He brought all his wealth with him. The underpeople and robots say that it is a wonderful place on the inside."

"Have you seen it?"

"Oh, no, sir, I have never left this building."

"Does the man Madigan ever come here?"

The robot seemed to be trying to laugh, but did not succeed. He answered, very unevenly, "Oh, no, sir. He never goes anywhere."

"Can you tell me anything about the female who lives with him?"

"No, sir," said the robot.

"Do you know anything about her?"

"Sir, it is not that. I know a great deal about her."

"Why can't you talk about her, then?"

"I have been commanded not to, sir."

"I am," said Casher O'Neill, "a true human being. I herewith countermand those orders. Tell me about her."

The robot's voice became formal and cold. "The orders cannot be countermanded, sir."

"Why not?" snapped Casher. "Are they the Administrator's?"

"No, sir."

"Whose, then?"

"Hers," said the robot softly, and left the room.

Casher O'Neill spent the rest of the day trying to get information; he obtained very little.

The Deputy Administrator was a young man who hated his chief.

When Casher, who dined with him, the two of them having a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poorly cooked state luncheon in a dining room which would have seated five hundred people, tried to come to the point by asking bluntly, "What do you know about Murray Madigan?", he got an answer which was blunt to the point of incivility.

"Nothing."

"You never heard of him?" cried Casher.

"Keep your troubles to yourself, mister visitor," said the Deputy Administrator. "I've got to stay on this planet long enough to get promoted off. You can leave. You shouldn't have come."

"I have," said Casher, "an all-world pass from the Instrumentality."

"All right," said the young man, "that shows that you are more important than I am. Let's not discuss the matter. Do you like your lunch?"

Casher had learned diplomacy in his childhood, when he was the heir apparent to the Dictatorship of Mizzer. When his horrible uncle, Kuraf, lost the rulership, Casher had approved of the coup by the Colonels Wedder and Gibna, but now Wedder was supreme and enforcing a period of terror and virtue. Casher thus knew courts and ceremony, big talk and small talk, and on this occasion he let the small talk do. The young Deputy Administrator had only one ambition, to get off the planet Henriada and never to see or hear of Rankin Meiklejohn again.

Casher could understand the point.

Only one curious thing happened during dinner.

Toward the end, Casher slipped in the question, very informally: "Can underpeople give orders to robots?"

"Of course," said the young man. "That's one of the reasons we use underpeople. They have more initiative. They amplify our orders to robots on many occasions."

Casher smiled. "I didn't mean it quite that way. Could an underperson give an order to a robot which a real human being could not then countermand?"

The young man started to answer, even though his mouth was full of food. He was not a very polished young man. Suddenly he stopped chewing and his eyes grew wide. Then, with his mouth half full, he said:

"You are trying to talk about this planet, I guess. You can't help it. You're on the track. Stay on the track, then. Maybe you will get out of it alive. I refuse to get mixed up with it, with you, with him and his hateful schemes. All I want to do is to leave when my time comes."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The young man resumed chewing, his eyes steadfastly on his plate.

Before Casher could pass off the matter by making some casual remark, the butler robot stopped behind him and leaned over.

"Honorable sir, I heard your question. May I answer it?"

"Of course," said Casher, softly.

"The answer, sir," said the butler-robot, softly but clearly, "to your question is *no, no, never.* That is the general rule of the civilized worlds. But on this planet of Henriada, sir, the answer is yes."

"Why?" said Casher.

"It is my duty, sir," said the robot butler, "to recommend to you this dish of fresh artichokes I am not authorized to deal with other matters."

"Thank you," said Casher, straining to keep himself looking imperturbable.

Nothing much happened that night, except that Meiklejohn got up long enough to get drunk all over again. Though he invited Casher to come and drink with him, he never seriously discussed the girl except for one outburst.

"Leave it till tomorrow. Fair and square. Open and aboveboard. Frank and honest. That's me. I'll take you around Beauregard myself. You'll see it's easy. A knife, eh? A travelled young man like you would know what to do with a knife. And a little girl, too. Not very big. Easy job. Don't give it another thought. Would you like some apple juice in your byegarr?"

Casher had taken three contraintoxicant pills before going to drink with the ex-Lord, but even at that he could not keep up with Meiklejohn. He accepted the dilution of apple juice gravely, gracefully and gratefully.

The little tornadoes stamped around the house. Meiklejohn, now launched into some drunken story of ancient injustices which had been done to him on other worlds, paid no attention to them. In the middle of the night, past nine-fifty in the evening, Casher woke alone in his chair, very stiff and uncomfortable. The robots must have had standing instructions concerning the Administrator, and had apparently taken him off to bed. Casher walked wearily to his own room, cursed the thundering ceiling and went to sleep again.

III

The next day was very different indeed.

The Administrator was as sob-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

er, brisk and charming as if he had never taken a drink in his life.

He had the robots call Casher to join him at breakfast and said, by way of greeting, "I'll wager you thought I was drunk last night."

"Well . . ." said Casher.

"Planet fever, that's what it was. Planet fever. A bit of alcohol keeps it from developing too far. Let's see. It's three-sixty now. Could you be ready to leave by four?"

Casher frowned at his watch, which had the conventional twenty-four hours.

The Administrator saw the glance and apologized. "Sorry! My fault, a thousand times. I'll get you a metric watch right away. Ten hours a day, a hundred minutes an hour. We're really very progressive on Henriada."

He clapped his hands and ordered that a watch be taken to Casher's room, along with a watch-repairing robot to adjust it to Casher's body rhythms.

"Four, then" he said, rising briskly from the table. "Dress for a trip by ground car. The servants will show you how."

There was a man already waiting in Casher's room. He looked like a plump, wise ancient Hindu, as shown in the archeology books. He bowed pleasantly and said, "My name is Gosigo. I am a forgetty, settled on this planet, but for this day I am your guide and driver from this place to the mansion of Beauregard."

Forgetties were barely above underpeople in status. They were persons convicted of various major crimes, to whom the courts of the worlds or the Instrumentality had allowed total amnesia instead of death or some punishment worse than death, such as the planet Shayol.

Casher looked at him curiously. The man did not carry with him the permanent air of bewilderment which Casper had noticed in many forgetties. Gosigo saw the glance and interpreted it.

"I'm well enough, now, sir. And I am strong enough to break your back if I had the orders to do it."

"You mean, damage my spine? What a hostile, unpleasant thing to do!" said Casher. "Anyhow, I rather think I could kill you first if you tried it. Whatever gave you such an idea?"

"The Administrator is always threatening people that he will have me do it to them."

"Have you ever really broken anybody's back?" asked Casher, looking Gosigo over very carefully and re-judging him. The man, though short-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

er than himself, was luxuriously muscled. Like many plump men, he looked pleasant on the outside but could be very formidable to an enemy.

Gosigo smiled briefly, almost happily. "Well, no, not exactly."

"Why haven't you? Does the Administrator always countermand his own orders? I should think that he would sometimes be too drunk to remember to do it."

"It's not that," said Gosigo.

"Why don't you, then?"

"I have other orders," said Gosigo, rather hesitantly. "Like the orders I have today. One set from the Administrator, one set from the Deputy Administrator and a third set from an outside source."

"Who's the outside source?"

"She has told me not to explain just yet."

Casher stood stock still. "Do you mean who I think you mean?"

Gosigo nodded very slowly, pointing at the ventilator as though it might have a microphone in it.

"Can you tell me what your orders are?"

"Oh, certainly. The Administrator has told me to drive you to Beauregard, to take you to the door, to watch you stab the undergirl and to call the second ground car to your rescue. The Deputy Administrator has told me to take you to Beauregard and to let you do as you please, bringing you back here by way of Ambiloxi if you happen to come out of Mister Murray's house alive."

"And the other orders?"

"To close the door upon you when you enter and to think of you no more in this life, because you will be very happy."

"Are you crazy?" cried Casher.

"I am a forgetty," said Gosigo, with some dignity, "but I am not insane."

"Whose orders are you going to obey, then?"

Gosigo smiled a warmly human smile at him. "Doesn't that depend on you, sir, and not on me? Do I look like a man who is going to kill you soon?"

"No, you don't," said Casher.

"Do you think what you look like to me?" went on Gosigo, with a purr. "Do you really think that I would help you if I thought that you would kill a small girl?"

"You know it!" cried Casher, feeling his face go white.

"Who doesn't?" said Gosigo. "What else have we got to talk about, here on Henriada? Let me help you on with these clothes, so that you will at least survive the ride." With this he handed shoulder padding and a padded

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

helmet to Casher, who began to put on the garments, very clumsily.

Gosigo helped him.

When Casher was fully dressed, he thought that he had never dressed this elaborately for space itself. The world of Henriada must be a tumultuous place if people needed this kind of clothing to make a short trip.

Gosigo had put on the same kind of clothes.

He looked at Casher, friendily, with an arch smile which came close to humor. "Look at me, honorable visitor. Do I remind you of anybody?"

Casher looked honestly and carefully, and then said, "No, you don't."

The man's face fell. "It's a game," he said. "I can't help trying to find out who I really am. Am I a Lord of the Instrumentality who has betrayed his trust? Am I a scientist who twisted knowledge into unimaginable wrong? Am I a dictator so foul that even the Instrumentality, which usually leaves things alone, had to step in and wipe me out? Here I am, healthy, wise, alert. I have the name Gosigo on this planet. Perhaps I am a mere native of this planet, who has committed a local crime. I am triggered. If anyone ever did tell me my true name or my actual past, I have been conditioned to shriek loud, fall unconscious and forget anything which might be said on such an occasion. People told me that I must have chosen this instead of death. Maybe. Death sometimes looks tidy to a forgetty."

"Have you ever screamed and fainted?"

"I don't even know *that*," said Gosigo, "no more than you know where you are going this very day."

Casher was tied to the man's mystifications, so he did not let himself be provoked into a useless show of curiosity. Inquisitive about the forgetty himself, he asked,

"Does it hurt?" he asked. "Does it hurt to be a forgetty?"

"No," said Gosigo, "it doesn't hurt, no more than you will."

Gosigo stared suddenly at Casher. His voice changed tone and became at least one octave higher. He clapped his hands to his face and panted through his hands as if he would never speak again.

"But, oh! the fear — the eerie, dreary fear of *being me*."

He still stared at Casher.

Quieting down at last, he pulled his hands away from his face, as if by sheer force, and said in an almost-normal voice, "Shall we get on with our trip?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gosigo led the way out into the bare bleak corridor. A perceptible wind was blowing through it, though there was no sign of an open window or door. They followed a majestic staircase, with steps so broad that Casher had to keep changing pace on them, all the way down to the bottom of the building. This must at some time have been a formal reception hall. Now it was full of cars.

Curious cars. Land vehicles of a kind which Casher had never seen before. They looked a little bit like the ancient "fighting tanks" which he had seen in pictures. They also looked a little like submarines of a singularly short and ugly shape. They had high spiked wheels, but their most complicated feature was a set of giant corkscrews, four on each side, attached to the car by intricate but operational apparatus. Since Casher had been landed right into the palace by planoform, he had never had occasion to go outside among the tornadoes of Henriada.

The Administrator was waiting, wearing a coverall on which was stencilled his insignia of rank.

Casher gave him a polite bow. He glanced down at the handsome metric wristwatch which Gosigo had strapped on his wrist, outside the coverall. It read 3:95.

Casher bowed to Rankin Meiklejohn and said:

"I'm ready, sir, if you are."

"Watch him!" whispered Gosigo, half a step behind Casher.

The Administrator said, "Might as well be going." His voice trembled.

Casher stood polite, alert, immobile. Was this danger? Was this foolishness? Could the Administrator already be drunk again?

Casher watched the Administrator carefully but quietly, waiting for the older man to precede him into the nearest ground car, which had its door standing opened.

Nothing happened, except that the Administrator began to turn pale.

There must have been six or eight people present. The others must have seen the same sort of thing before, because they showed no sign of curiosity or bewilderment. The Administrator began to tremble. Casher could see it, even through the bulk of the travelwear. The man's hands shook.

The Administrator said, in a high nervous voice: "Your knife, you have it with you?"

Casher nodded.

"Let me see it," said the Administrator.

Casher reached down to his boot and brought out the beau-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tiful superbly balanced knife. Before he could stand erect, he felt the clamp of Gosigo's heavy fingers on his shoulder.

"Master," said Gosigo to Meiklejohn, "tell your visitor to put the weapon away. It is not allowed for any of us to show weapons in your presence."

Casher tried to squirm out of the heavy grip without losing his balance or his dignity. He found that Gosigo was knowledgeable about karate too. The forgetty held ground, even when the two men waged an immobile, invisible sort of wrestling match, the leverage of Casher's shoulder working its way hither and yon against the strong grip of Gosigo's powerful hand.

The Administrator ended it; he said, "Put away your knife," in that high funny voice of his.

The watch had almost reached 4:00 but no one had yet gotten into the car.

Gosigo spoke again, and when he did there was a contemptuous laugh from the Deputy Administrator, who had stood by in ordinary indoor clothes.

"Master, isn't it time for 'one for the road'?"

"Of course, of course," chattered the Administrator. He began breathing almost normally.

"Join me," he said to Casher. "It's a local custom."

Casher had let his knife slip back into his bootsheath; when the knife dropped out of sight Gosigo had released his shoulder; he now stood facing the Administrator and rubbing his shoulder. He said nothing, but shook his head gently, showing that he definitely did not want a drink.

One of the robots brought the Administrator a glass which appeared to contain at least a liter and a half of water. The Administrator said, very politely, "Sure you won't share it?"

This close, Casher could smell the reek of it. It was pure byegarr, and at least 160 proof. He shook his head again, firmly but also politely.

The Administrator lifted the glass.

Casher could see the muscles of the man's throat work as the liquid went down. He could hear the man breathing heavily between swallows. The white liquid went lower and lower in the gigantic glass.

At last it was all gone.

The Administrator cocked his head sidewise and said to Casher in a parrot-like voice, "Well, toodle-oo!"

"What do you mean, sir?" said Casher.

The Administrator had a pleasant glow on his face. Casher was surprised that the man was not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dead after that big and sudden a drink.

"I just mean, g'by. I'm not feeling . . . well."

With that he fell straight forward, as stiff as a rock tower. One of the servants, perhaps another forgetty, caught him before he hit the ground.

"Does he always do this?" said Casher to the miserable and contemptuous Deputy Administrator.

"Oh, no," said the Deputy. "Only at times like these."

"What do you mean, 'like these'?"

"When he sends one more armed man against the girl at Beauregard. They never come back. You won't come back, either. You could have left earlier, but you can't now. Go along and try to kill the girl. I'll see you here about 5:25 if you succeed. As a matter of fact, if you come back at all, I'll try to wake *him* up. But you won't come back. Good luck. I suppose that's what you need."

Casher shook hands with the man without removing his gloves. Gosigo had already climbed into the driver's seat of the machine and was testing the electric engines. The big corkscrews began to plunge down. But before they touched the floor Gosigo had reversed them and thrown them back into the "up" position.

The people in the room ran for cover as Casher entered the machine, though there was no immediate danger in sight. Two of the human servants dragged the Administrator up the stairs, the Deputy Administrator following them rapidly.

"Seat belt," said Gosigo.

Casher found it and snapped it to.

"Head belt," said Gosigo.

Casher stared at him. He had never heard of a head belt.

"Pull it down from the roof, sir. Put the net under your chin."

Casher glanced up.

There was a net fitted snug against the roof of the vehicle, just above his head. He started to pull it down, but it did not yield. Angrily, he pulled harder, and it moved slowly downward. "By the Bell and Bank, do they want to hang me in this!" he thought to himself as he dragged the net down. There was a strong fibre belt attached to each end of the net, while the net itself was only fifteen to twenty centimeters wide. He ended up in a foolish position, holding the head belt with both hands lest it snap back into the ceiling and not knowing what to do with it. Gosigo leaned over and, half-impatiently, helped him adjust the web under his chin. It pinched

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for a moment and Casher felt as though his head were being dragged by a heavy weight.

"Don't fight it," said Gosigo. "Relax."

Casher did. His head was lifted several centimeters into a foam pocket, which he had not previously noticed, in the back of the seat. After a second or two, he realized that the position was odd but comfortable.

Gosigo had adjusted his own head belt and had turned on the lights of the vehicle. They blazed so bright that Casher almost thought they might be a laser, capable of charring the inner doors of the big room.

The lights must have keyed the door.

IV

Two panels slid open and a wild uproar of wind and vegetation rushed in. It was rough and stormy but far below hurricane velocity.

The machine rolled forward clumsily and was out of the house and on the road very quickly.

The sky was brown, bright luminous brown, shot through with streaks of yellow. Casher had never seen a sky of that color on any other world he had visited, and in his long exile he had seen many planets.

Gosigo, staring straight ahead, was preoccupied with keeping the vehicle right in the middle of the black, soft, tarry road.

"Watch it!" said a voice speaking right into his head.

It was Gosigo, using an intercom which must have been built into the helmets.

Casher watched, though there was nothing to see except for the rush of mad wind. Suddenly the ground car turned dark, spun upside down, and was violently shaken. An oily, pungent stench of pure fetor immediately drenched the whole car.

Gosigo pulled out a panel with a console of buttons. Light and fire, intolerably bright, burned in on them through the windshield and portholes on the side.

The battle was over before it began.

The ground car lay in a sort of swamp. The road was visible thirty or thirty-five meters away.

There was a grinding sound inside the machine and the ground car righted itself. A singular sucking noise followed, then the grinding sound stopped. Casher could glimpse the big corkscrews on the side of the car eating their way into the ground.

At last the machine was steady, pelted only by branches, leaves, and what seemed like kelp.

A small tornado was passing over them.

Gosigo took time to twist his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

head sidewise and to talk to Casher.

"An air-whale swallowed us and I had to burn our way out."

"A what?" cried Casher.

"An air-whale," repeated Gosigo calmly on the intercom. "There are no indigenous forms of life on this planet, but the imported Earth forms have changed wildly since we brought them in. The tornadoes lifted the whales around enough so that some of them got adapted to flying. They were the meat-eating kind, so they like to crack our ground cars open and eat the goodies inside. We're safe enough from them for the time being, provided we can make it back to the road. There are a few wild men who live in the wind, but they would not become dangerous to us unless we found ourselves really helpless. Pretty soon I can unscrew us from the ground and try to get back on the road. It's not really too far from here to Ambiloxi."

The trip to the road was a long one, even though they could see the road itself all the times that they tried various approaches.

The first time, the ground car tipped ominously forward. Red lights showed on the panel and buzzers buzzed. The great spiked wheels spun in vain as they chewed their way into a bottomless quagmire.

Gosigo, calling back to his passenger, cried, "Hold steady! We're going to have to shoot ourselves out of this one backward!"

Casher did not know how he could be any steadier, belted, hooded and strapped as he was, but he clutched the arms of his seat.

The world went red with fire as the front of the car spat flame in rocket-like quantities. The swamp ahead of them boiled into steam, so that they could see nothing.

Gosigo changed the windshield over from visual to radar, and even with radar there was not much to be seen—nothing but a gray swirl for formless wraiths, and the weird lurching sensation as the machine fought its way back to solid ground. The console suddenly showed green and Gosigo cut the controls. They were back where they had been, with the repulsive burnt entrails of the air-whale scattered among the coral trees.

"Try again," said Gosigo, as though Casher had something to do with the matter.

He fiddled with the controls and the ground car rose several feet. The spikes on the wheels had been hydraulically extended until they were each at least 150 centimeters long. In sensation, the car felt like a large enclosed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ON THE STORM PLANET

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bicycle as it teetered on its big wheels. The wind was strong and capricious but there was no tornado in sight.

"Here we go," said Gosigo. The ground car pressed forward in a mad rush, hastening obliquely through the vegetation and making for the highway on Casher's right.

A bone-jarring crash told them that they had not made it. For a moment he was too dizzy to see where they were.

He was glad of his helmet and happy about the web brace which held his neck. That crash would have killed him if he had not had full protection.

Gosigo seemed to think the trip normal. His classic Hindu features relaxed in a wise smile as he said, "Hit a boulder. Fell on our side. Try again."

Casher managed to gasp, "Is the machine unbreakable?"

There was a laugh in Gosigo's voice when he answered. "Almost. We're the most vulnerable in it."

Again fire spat at the ground, this time from the side of the ground car. It balanced itself precariously on the four high wheels. Gosigo turned on the radar screen to see through the steam which their own jets had called up.

There the road was, plain and near.

"Try again!" he shouted, as the machine lunged forward and then performed a veritable ballet on the surface of the marsh. It rushed, slowed, turned around on a hummock, gave itself an assist with the jets and then scrambled through the water.

Casher saw the inverted cone of a tornado, half a kilometer or less away, veering toward them.

Gosigo sensed his unspoken thought, because he answered:

"Problem: who gets to the road first, that or we?"

The machine bucked, lurched, twisted, spun.

Casher could see nothing any more from the windscreen in front, but it was obvious that Gosigo knew what he was doing.

There was the sickening, stomach-wrenching twist of a big drop and then a new sound was heard —a grinding as of knives.

Gosigo, unworried, took his head out of the head net and looked over at Casher with a smile. "The twister will probably hit us in a minute or two, but it doesn't matter now. We're on the road and I've bolted us to the surface."

"Bolted?" gasped Casher.

"You know, those big screws on the outside of the car. They were made to go right into the road. All the roads here are neo-asphaltum and self-repairing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There will be traces of them here when the last known person on the last known planet is dead. These are *good* roads." He stopped for the sudden hush. "Storm's going over us." It began again before he could finish his sentence. Wild raving winds tore at the machine which sat so solid that it seemed bedded in permastone.

Gosigo pushed two buttons and then calibrated a dial. He squinted at his instruments and then pressed a button mounted on the edge of his navigator's seat. There was a sharp explosion, like a blasting of rock by chemical methods.

Casher started to speak but Gosigo held out a warning hand for silence.

He turned his dials quickly. The windscreen faded out, radar came on and then went off. At last a bright map—bright red in background, with sharp gold lines—appeared across the whole width of the screen. There were a dozen or more bright points on the map. Gosigo watched these intently.

The map blurred, faded, dissolved into red chaos.

Gosigo pushed another button and then could see out of the front glass screen again.

"What was that?" said Casher.

"Miniaturized radar rocket. I sent it up twelve kilometers for a look around. It transmitted a map of what it saw and I put it on our radar screen. The tornadoes are heavier than usual, but I think we can make it. Did you notice the top right of the map?

"The top right?" said Casher.

"Yes, the top right Did you see what was there?"

"Why, nothing," said Casher. "Nothing was there."

"You're utterly right," said Gosigo. "What does that mean to you?"

"I don't understand you," said Casher. "I suppose it means that there is nothing there."

"Right again. But let me tell you something. There never is."

"Never is what?"

"Anything," said Gosigo. "There never is anything on the maps at that point. That's east of Ambiloxi. That's Beauregard. It never shows on the maps. Nothing happens there."

"No bad weather—ever?" said Casher.

"Never," said Gosigo.

"Why not?" said Casher.

"*She* will not permit it," said Gosigo firmly, as though his words made sense.

"You mean, her weather machines work?" said Casher, grasping for the only rational explanation possible.

"Yes," said Gosigo.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Why?" Casher asked, more perplexed than ever.

"She pays for them."

"How can she?" exclaimed Casher. "Your whole world of Henriada is bankrupt!"

"Her part isn't."

"Stop mystifying me," said Casher. "Tell me who she is and what this is all about."

"Put you head in the net," said Gosigo. "I am not making puzzles because I want to do so. I have been commanded not to talk."

"Because you are a forgetty."

"What's that got to do with it? Don't talk to me that way. Remember, I am not an animal or an underperson. I may be your servant for a few hours, but I am a *man*. You'll find out, soon enough. *Hold tight!*"

The ground car came to a panic stop, the spiked teeth eating into the resilient firm neo-asphaltum of the road. At the instant they stopped, the outside corkscrews began chewing their way into the ground. First Casher felt as though his eyes were popping out, because of the suddenness of the deceleration; now he felt like holding the arms of his seat as the tornado reached directly for their car, plucking at it again and again. The enormous outside screws held and he could feel the car straining to meet the gigantic suction of the storm.

"Don't worry," shouted Gosigo over the noise of the storm. "I always spin us down a little bit more by firing the quick-rockets straight up. These cars don't often go off the road."

Casher tried to relax.

The funnel of the tornado, which seemed almost like a living being, plucked after them once or twice more and then was gone as suddenly as it had hit.

This time, Casher had seen no sign of the air-whales which rode the storms. He had seen nothing but rain and wind and desolation.

The tornado was gone in a moment. Ghostlike shapes trailed after it in enormous prancing leaps.

"Wind-men," said Gosigo glancing at them incuriously. "Wild people who have learned to live on Henriada. They aren't much more than animals. We are close to the territory of the lady. They would not dare attack us here."

Casher O'Neill was too stunned to query the man or to challenge him. He tried once more to relax.

Once more the car picked itself up and coursed along the smooth, narrow, winding neo-asphaltum road, almost as though the machine itself were glad to function and to be functioning well.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

V

Casher could never quite remember when they went from the howling wildness of Henriada into the stillness and beauty of the domains of Mister Murray Madigan. He could recall the feeling but not the facts.

The town of Ambiloxi eluded him completely. It was so normal a town, so old-fashioned a little town that he could not think of it very much. Old people sat on the wooden boardwalk taking their afternoon look at the strangers who passed through. Horses were tethered in a row along main street, between the parked machines. It looked like a peaceful picture from the ancient ages.

Of tornadoes there was no sign, nor of the hurt and ruin which showed around the house of Rankin Meiklejohn. There were few underpeople or robots about, unless they were so cleverly contrived as to look almost exactly like real people. How can you remember something which is pleasant and non-memorable? Even the buildings did not show signs of being fortified agair t the frightful storms which had brought the prosperous planet of Henriada to a condition of abandonment and ruin. Gosigo, who had a remarkable talent for stating the obvious, said tonelessly.

"The weather machines are working here. There is no need for special precaution." But he did not stop in the town for rest, refreshments, conversation or fuel. He went through deftly and quietly, the gigantic armored ground car looking out of place among the peaceful and defenseless vehicles. He went as though he had been on the same route many times before, and knew the routine well.

Once beyond Ambiloxi he speeded up, though at a moderate pace, compared to the frantic elusive action he had taken against storms in the earlier part of the trip. The landscape was earthlike . . . wet . . . and most of the ground was covered with vegetation.

Old radar countermissile towers stood along the road.

Casher could not imagine their possible use, even though he was sure, from the looks of them, that they were long obsolete.

"What's the countermissile radar for?" he asked, speaking comfortably now that his head was out of the head net.

Gosigo turned around and gave him a tortured glance in which pain and bewilderment were mixed. "Countermissile radar? Countermissile radar? I don't know that word, though it seems as though I should . . ."

"Radar is what you were us-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing to see with, back in the storm, when the ceiling and visibility were zero."

Gosigo turned back to his driving, narrowly missing a tree. "That? That's just artificial vision. Why did you use the word 'countermissile radar'? There isn't any of that stuff here except what we have on our machine, though the mistress may be watching us if her set is on."

"Those towers," said Casher. "They look like countermissile towers from the ancient times."

"Towers. There aren't any towers here," snapped Gosigo.

"Look," cried Casher. "Here are two more of them."

"Oh, no man made those. They aren't buildings, just air coral. Some of the coral which people brought from earth mutated and got so it could live in the air. People used to plant it for windbreaks, before they decided to give up Henriada and move out. They didn't do much good, but they are pretty to look at."

They rode along a few minutes without asking questions. Tall trees had spanish moss trailing over them. They were close to a sea. Small marshes appeared to the right and left of the road; here, where the endless tornadoes were kept out, everything had a park-like effect. The domains of the estate of Beauregard were unlike anything else on Henriada — an area of peaceful wildness in a world which was rushing otherwise toward uninhabitability and ruin. Even Gosigo seemed more relaxed, more cheerful as he steered the ground car along the pleasant elevated road.

Gosigo sighed, leaned forward, managed the controls and brought the car to a stop.

He turned around calmly and looked full-face at Casher O'Neill.

"You have your knife?"

Casher automatically felt for it. It was there, safe enough in his bootsheath. He simply nodded.

"You have your orders."

"You mean, killing the girl?"

"Yes," said Gosigo, "killing the girl."

"I remember that. You didn't have to stop the car to tell me that."

"I'm telling you now," said Gosigo, his wise Hindu face showing neither humor nor outrage. "Do it."

"You mean, kill her? Right at first sight?"

"Do it," said Gosigo. "You have your orders."

"I'm the judge of that," said Casher. "It will be on my conscience. Are you watching me for the Administrator?"

"That drunken fool?" said

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gosigo. "I don't care about him, except that I am a forgetty and I belong to him. We're in *her* territory now. You are going to do whatever she wants. You have orders to kill her. All right. Kill her."

"You mean — she wants to be murdered?"

"Of course not!" said Gosigo, with the irritation of an adult who has to explain too many things to an inquisitive child.

"Then how can I kill her without finding out what this is all about?"

"She knows. She knows herself — she knows her master — she knows this planet. She knows me and she knows something about you. Go ahead and kill her, since those are your orders. If she wants to die, that's not for you or me to decide. It's her business. If she does not want to die, you will not succeed."

"I'd like to see the person," said Casher, "who could stop me in a sudden knife attack. Have *you* told her that I am coming?"

"I've told her nothing, but she knows we are coming and she is pretty sure what you have been sent for. Don't think about it. Just do what you are told. Jump for her with the knife. She will take care of the matter."

"But — " cried Casher.

"Stop asking questions," said Gosigo. "Just follow orders and remember that she will take care of you. Even you." He started up the ground car.

Within less than a kilometer they had crossed a low ridge of land and there before them lay Beauregard — the mansion at the edge of the waters, its white pillars shining, its pergolas glistening in the bright air, its yards and palmettos tidy.

Casher was a brave man, but he felt the palms of his hands go wet when he realized that in a minute or two he would have to commit a murder.

VI

The ground car swung up the drive. It stopped. Without a word, Gosigo activated the door. The air smelled calm, sea-wet, salt and yet coolly fresh.

Casher jumped out and ran to the door, surprised to feel that his legs trembled as he ran.

He had killed before, real men in real quarrels. Why should a mere animal matter to him?

The door stopped him.

Without thinking, he tried to wrench it open.

The knob did not yield and there was no automatic control in sight. This was indeed a very antique sort of house. He struck the door with his hands. The thuds sounded around him. He could not tell whether they re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sounded in the house. No sound or echo came from beyond the door.

He began rehearsing the phrase, "I want to see Mister and Owner Madigan . . ."

The door did open.

A little girl stood there.

He knew her. He had always known her. She was his sweetheart, come back out of his childhood. She was the sister he had never had. She was his own mother, when young. She was at the marvellous age, somewhere between ten and thirteen, where the child — as the phrase goes — "becomes an old old child and not a raw grown-up." She was kind, calm, intelligent, expectant, quiet, inviting, unafraid. She felt like someone he had never left behind: yet, at the same moment, he knew he had never seen her before.

He heard his voice asking for the Mister and Owner Madigan while he wondered, at the back of his mind, who the girl might be. Madigan's daughter? Neither Rankin Meiklejohn nor the deputy had said anything about a human family.

The child looked at him levelly.

He must have finished braying his question at her.

"Mister and Owner Madigan," said the child, "sees no one this day, but you are seeing me."

There was humor and fearlessness in her eyes.

"Who are you?" he blurted out.

"I am the housekeeper of this house. My name is T'ruth."

His knife was in his hand before he knew how it had gotten there. He remembered the advice of the Administrator: *plunge, plunge, stab, stab, run!*

She saw the knife but her eyes did not waver from his face.

He looked at her uncertainly.

If this was an underperson, it was the most remarkable one he had ever seen. But even Gosigo had told him to do his duty, to stab, to kill the woman named T'ruth. Here she was. He could not do it.

He spun the knife in the air, caught it by its tip and held it out to her, handle first.

"I was sent to kill you," he said, "but I find I cannot do it. I have lost a cruiser."

"Kill me if you wish," she said, "because I have no fear of you."

Her calm words were so far outside his experience that he took the knife in his left hand and lifted his arm as if to stab toward her.

He dropped his arm.

"I cannot do it," he whined. "What have you done to me?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I have done nothing to you. You do not wish to kill a child and I look to you like a child. Besides, I think you love me. If this is so, it must be very comfortable for you."

Casher heard his knife clatter to the floor as he dropped it. He had never dropped it before.

"Who are you," he gasped, "that you should do this to me?"

"I am me," she said, her voice as tranquil and happy as that of any girl, provided that the girl was caught at a moment of great happiness and poise. "I am the housekeeper of this house." She smiled almost impishly and added, "It seems that I must almost be the ruler of this planet as well." Her voice turned serious. "*Man*," she said, "can't you see it, man? I am an animal, a turtle. I am incapable of disobeying the word of man. When I was little I was trained and I was given orders. I shall carry out those orders as long as I live. When I look at you, I feel strange. You look as though you loved me already, but you do not know what to do. Wait a moment. I must let Gosigo go."

The shining knife on the floor of the doorway, she saw; she stepped over it.

Gosigo had gotten out of the ground car and was giving her a formal, low bow.

"Tell me," she cried, "what you have just seen!" There was friendliness in her call, as though the routine were an old game.

"I saw Casher O'Neill bound up the steps. You yourself opened the door. He thrust his dagger into your throat and the blood spat out in a big stream, rich and dark and red. You died in the doorway. For some reason Casher O'Neill went on into the house without saying anything to me. I became frightened and I fled."

He did not look frightened at all.

"If I am dead," she said, "how can I be talking to you?"

"Don't ask me," cried Gosigo. "I am just a forgetty. I always go back to the Honorable Rankin Meiklejohn, each time that you are murdered, and I tell him the truth of what I saw. Then he gives me the medicine and I tell him something else. At that point he will get drunk and gloomy again, the way that he always does."

"It's a pity," said the child. "I wish I could help him, but I can't. He won't come to Beauregard."

"Him?" laughed Gosigo. "Oh, no, not him! Never! He just sends other people to kill you."

"And he's never satisfied," said the child sadly, "no matter how many times he kills me!"

"Never," said Gosigo cheer-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fully, climbing back into the ground car. " 'By now."

"Wait a moment," she called. "Wouldn't you like something to eat or drink before you drive back. There's a bad clutch of storms on the road."

"Not me," said Gosigo. "He might punish me and make me a forgetty all over again. Say, maybe that's already happened. Maybe I'm a forgetty who's been put through it several times, not just once." Hope surged into his voice. "T'ruth! T'ruth! Can you tell me?"

"Suppose I did tell you," said she. "What would happen?"

His face became sad, "I'd have a convulsion and forget what I told you. Well, good-by anyhow. I'll take a chance on the storms. If you ever see that Casher O'Neill again," called Gosigo, looking right through Casher O'Neill, "tell him I liked him but that we'll never meet again."

"I'll tell him," said the girl gently. She watched as the heavy brown man climbed nimbly into the car. The top crammed shut with no sound. The wheels turned and in a moment the car had disappeared behind the palmettoes in the drive.

While she had talked to Gosigo in her clear warm high girlish voice, Casher had watched her. He could see the thin shape of her shoulders under the light blue shift that she wore. Her hips had not begun to fill. When he glanced at her in one-quarter profile, he could see that her cheek was smooth, her hair well-combed, her little breasts just beginning to bud on her chest. Who was this child who acted like an empress?

She turned back to him and gave him a warm, apologetic smile.

"Gosigo and I always talk over the story together. Then he goes back and Meiklejohn does not believe it and spends unhappy months planning my murder all over again. I suppose, since I am just an animal, that I should not call it a 'murder' when somebody tries to kill me, but I resist, of course. I do not care about me, but I have strong orders to keep my master and his house safe from harm."

"How old are you?" said Casher. He added, " — if you can tell the truth."

"I can tell nothing but the truth. I am conditioned. I am nine hundred and six earth-years old."

"Nine hundred?" he cried. "But you look like a child!"

"I am a child," said the girl, "and not a child. I am an earth turtle, changed into human form by the convenience of man. My

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

life expectancy was increased three hundred times when I was modified. They tell me that my normal life span should have been three hundred years. Now it is ninety thousand years, and sometimes I am afraid. You will be dead of happy old age, Casher O'Neill, while I am still opening the drapes in this house to let the sunlight in. But let's not stand in the door and talk. Come on in and get some refreshments. You're not going anywhere, you know."

Casher followed her into the house but he put his worry into words, "You mean I am your prisoner."

"Not my prisoner, Casher. Yours. How could you cross that ground which you travelled in the ground car? You could get to the ends of my estate all right, but then the storms would pick you up and whirl you away to a death which nobody would even see."

She turned into a big old room, bright with light-colored wooden furniture.

VII

Casher stood there, awkwardly. He had returned his knife to its boot-sheath when they left the vestibule. Now he felt very odd, sitting with his victim on a sun-porch.

T'ruth was untroubled. She rang a brass bell which stood on an old-fashioned round table. Feminine footsteps clattered in the hall. A female servant entered the room, dressed in a black dress with a white apron. Casher had seen such servants in the old drama cubes, but he had never expected to meet one in the flesh.

"We'll have high tea," said T'ruth. "Which do you prefer, tea or coffee, Casher? Or I have beer and wines. Even two bottles of whiskey brought all the way from Earth."

"Coffee would be fine for me," said Casher.

"And you know what I want, Eunice," said T'ruth to the servant.

"Yes, ma'am," said the maid, disappearing.

Casher leaned forward.

"That servant — is she human?"

"Certainly," said T'ruth.

"Then why is she working for an underperson like you? I mean — I don't mean to be unpleasant or anything — but I mean that's against all laws."

"Not here on Henriada, it isn't."

"And why not?" persisted Casher.

"Because on Henriada I am myself the law."

"But the government — ?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It's gone," she said calmly.

"The Instrumentality?"

T'ruth frowned. She looked like a wise, puzzled child. "Maybe you know that part better than I do. They leave an administrator here, probably because they do not have any other place to put him and because he needs some kind of work to keep him alive. Yet they do not give him enough real power to arrest my master or to kill me. They ignore me. It seems to me that if I do not challenge them, they leave me alone."

"But their rules — ?"

"They don't enforce them, neither here in Beauregard nor over in the town of Ambiloxi. They leave it up to me to keep these places going. I do the best I can."

"That servant, then? Did they lease her to you?"

"Oh, no," laughed the girl-woman. "She came to kill me twenty years ago, but she was a forgetty and she had no place else to go, so I trained her as a maid. She has a contract with my master, and her wages are paid every month into the satellite above the planet. She can leave if she ever wants to. I don't think she will."

Casher sighed. "This is all too hard to believe. You are a child, but you are almost a thousand years old. You're an underperson, but you command a whole planet —"

"Only when I need to!" she interrupted him.

"You are wiser than most of the people I have ever known and yet you look young. How old do you feel?"

"I feel like a child," she said, "a child one thousand years old. And I have had the education and the memory and the experience of a wise lady stamped right into my brain."

"Who was the lady?" said Casher.

"The Owner and Citizen Agatha Madigan. The wife of my master. As she was dying they transcribed her brain on mine. That's why I speak so well and know so much."

"But that's illegal!" cried Casher.

"I suppose it was," T'ruth agreed, "but my master had it done anyhow."

Casher leaned forward in his chair. He looked earnestly at the person. One part of him still loved her for the wonderful little girl whom he had thought she was, but another part was in awe of being more powerful than anyone he had seen before. She returned his gaze with that composed half-smile which was wholly feminine and completely self-possessed; she looked tenderly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

upon him as their faces were reflected by the yellow morning light of Henriada. "I begin to understand," he said, "that you are what you have to be. It is very strange, here in this forgotten world."

"Henriada is strange," she said, "and I suppose that I must seem strange to you. You are right, though, about each of us being what she has to be. Isn't that liberty itself? If we each one *must* be something, isn't liberty the business of finding it out and then doing it — that one job, that uttermost mission compatible with our natures? How terrible it would be, to be something and never know what!"

"Like who?" said Casher.

"Like Gosigo, perhaps. He was a great king and he was a good king, on some faraway world where they still need kings. But he committed an intolerable mistake and the Instrumentality made him into a forgetty and sent him here."

"So that's the mystery!" said Casher. "And what am I?"

She looked at him calmly and steadfastly before she answered. "You are a killer, Casher O'Neill. You are a good man, but you are a killer too. It must make your life very hard in many ways. You keep having to justify yourself."

This was so close to the truth — so close to Casher's long worries as to whether justice might not just be a cover name for "revenge" — that it was his turn to gasp and be silent.

"And I have work for you," added the amazing child.

"Work? Here?"

"Yes. Something much worse than killing. And you must do it, Casher, if you want to go away from here before I die, eighty-nine thousand years from now." She looked around. "Hush!" she added. "Eunice is coming and I do not want to frighten her by letting her know the terrible things that you are going to have to do."

"Here?" he whispered urgently. "Right here, in this house?"

"Right here in this house," said she in a normal voice, as Eunice entered the room bearing a huge tray covered with plates of food and two pots of beverage.

Casher stared at the human woman who worked so cheerfully for an animal, but neither Eunice, who was busy setting things out on the table, nor T'ruth who, turtle and woman that she was, could not help rearranging the dishes with gentle peremptories, paid the least attention to him.

The words rang in his head. "In this house . . . something worse than killing."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They made no sense. Neither did it make sense to have high tea before five hours, decimal time.

He sighed and they both glanced at him with affectionate concern.

"He's taking it better than most of them do, ma'am," said Eunice. "Most of them who come here to kill you are very upset when they find out that they cannot do it."

"He's a killer, Eunice, a real killer, so I think he wasn't too bothered."

Eunice turned to him very pleasantly and said, "A killer, sir. It's a pleasure to have you here. Most of them are terrible amateurs and then the lady has to heal them before we can find something for them to do."

Casher couldn't resist a spot inquiry. "Are all the other would-be killers still here?"

"Most of them, sir. The ones that nothing happened to. Like me. Where else would we go? Back to the Administrator, Rankin Meiklejohn?" She said the last with heavy scorn indeed, curtseyed to him, bowed deeply to the woman-girl T'ruth, and left the room.

T'ruth looked friendlily at Casher O'Neill. "I can tell that you will not digest your food if you sit here waiting for bad news. When I said you had to do something worse than killing, I suppose I was speaking from a woman's point of view. We have a homicidal maniac in the house. He is a house guest and he is covered by Old North Australian law. That means we cannot kill him or expel him, though he is almost as immortal as I am. I hope that you and I can frighten him away from molesting my master. I cannot cure him or love him. He is too crazy to be reached through his emotions. Pure, utter awful fright might do it, and it takes a man for that job. If you do this, I will reward you richly."

"And if I don't?" said Casher.

Again she stared at him as though she were trying to see through his eyes all the way down to the bottom of his soul; again he felt for her that tremor of compassion, ever so slightly tinged with male desire, which he had experienced when he first met her in the doorway of Beauregard.

Their locked glances broke apart.

T'ruth looked at the floor. "I cannot lie," she said, as though it were a handicap. "If you do not help me I shall have to do the things which it is in my power to do. The chief thing is nothing. To let you live here, to let you sleep and eat in this house

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

until you get bored and ask me for some kind of routine work around the estate. I could make you work," she went on, looking up at him and blushing all the way to the top of her bodice, "by having you fall in love with me, but that would not be kind. I will not do it that way. Either you make a deal with me or you do not. It's up to you. Anyhow, let's eat first. I've been up since dawn, expecting one more killer. I even wondered if you might be the one who would succeed. That would be terrible, to leave my master all alone!"

"But you — wouldn't you yourself mind being killed?"

"Me? When I've already lived a thousand years and have eighty-nine thousand more to go? It couldn't matter less to me. Have some coffee."

And she poured his coffee.

VIII

Two or three times Casher tried to get the conversation back to the work at hand, but T'ruth diverted him with trivialities. She even made him walk to the enormous window, where they could see far across the marshes and the bay.

The sky in the remote distance was dark and full of worms. Those were tornadoes, beyond the reach of her weather machines, which coursed around the rest of Henriada but stopped short at the boundaries of Ambiloxi and Beauregard. She made him admire the weird coral castles which had built themselves up from the bay bottom, hundreds of feet into the air. She tried to make him see a family of wild wind-people who were slyly and gently stealing apples from her orchard, but either his eyes were not used to the landscape or T'ruth could see much further than he could.

This was a world rich in water. If it had not been located within a series of bad pockets of space, the water itself could have become an export. Mankind had done the best it could, raising kelp to provide the iron and phosphorus so often lacking in off-world diets, controlling the weather at great expense. Finally the Instrumentality recommended that they give up. The exports of Henriada never quite balanced the imports. The subsidies had gone far beyond the usual times. The earth-life had adapted with a vigor which was much too great. Ordinary forms rapidly found new shapes, challenged by the winds, the rains, the novel chemistry and the odd radiation patterns of Henriada. Killer whales became airborne, coral took to the air, human babies lost in the wind sometimes sur-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vived to become subhuman and wild. Even jellyfish became sky-sweepers.

The former inhabitants of Henriada had chosen a planet at a reasonable price — not cheap, but reasonable — from the owner, who had in turn bought it from a post-Soviet settling cooperative. They had leased the new planet, had worked out an ecology, had emigrated, and were now doing well.

Henriada kept the wild weather, the lost hopes and the ruins. And of these ruins, the greatest was Murray Madigan.

Once a prime landholder and host, a gentleman among gentlemen, the richest man on the whole world, Madigan had become old, senile, weak. He faced death or catalepsis. The death of his wife made him fear his own death and with his turtle-girl T'ruth, he had chosen catalepsis.

Most of the time he was frozen in a trance, his heartbeat imperceptible, his metabolism very slow. Then, for a few hours or days, he was normal. Sometimes the sleeps were for weeks, sometimes for years. The Instrumentality doctors had looked him over — more out of scientific curiosity than from any judicial right — and had decided that though this was an odd way to live, it was a legal one. They went away and left him alone. He had had the whole personality of his dying wife Agatha Madigan impressed on the turtle-child, though this was illegal. Quite simply, the doctor had been bribed.

All this was told by T'ruth to Casher as they ate and drank their way slowly through an immense repast.

An archaic wood fire roared in a real fireplace.

While she talked, Casher watched the gentle movement of her shoulderblades when she moved forward, the loose movement of her light dress as she moved, the childish face which was so tender, so appealing and yet so wise.

Knowing as little as he did about the planet of Henriada, Casher tried desperately to fit his own thinking together and to make sense out of the predicament in which he found himself. Even if the girl were attractive, this told him nothing of the real challenges which he still faced inside this very house. No longer was his preoccupation with getting the power cruiser his main job on Henriada. No evidence was at hand to show that the drunken, deranged Administrator, Rankin Meiklejohn, would give him anything at all unless he, Casher, killed the girl.

Even that had become a for-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gotten mission. Despite the fact that he had come to the estate of Beauregard for the purpose of killing her, he was now on a journey without a destination.

Years of sad experience had taught him that when a project went completely to pieces, he still had the mission of personal survival, if his life were to mean anything to his home planet, Mizzer, and if his return, in any way or any fashion, could bring real liberty back to the Twelve Niles.

So he looked at the girl with a new kind of unconcern. How could she help his plans? Or hinder them? The promises she made were too vague to be of any real use in the sad complicated world of politics.

He just tried to enjoy her company and the strange place in which he found himself.

The Gulf of Esperanza lay just within his vision. At the far horizon he could see the helpless tornadoes trying to writhe their way past the weather machines which still functioned, at the expense of Beauregard, all along the coast from Ambiloxi to Mottile. He could see the shoreline choked with kelp, which had once been a cash crop and was now a nuisance. Ruined buildings in the distance were probably the leftovers of processing plants; the artificial-looking coral castles obscured his view of them.

And this house — how much sense did this house make?

An undergirl, eerily wise, who herself admitted that she had obtained an unlawful amount of conditioning; a master who was a living corpse; a threat which could not even be mentioned freely within the house; a household which seemed to have displaced the planetary government; a planetary government which the Instrumentality, for unfathomable reasons of its own, had let fall into ruin. Why? Why?

The turtle-girl was looking at him. If he had been an art student, he would have said that she was giving him the tender, feminine and irrecoverably remote smile of a Madonna, but he did not know the motifs of the ancient pictures; he just knew that it was a smile characteristic of T'ruth herself.

"You are wondering . . .?" she said.

He nodded, suddenly feeling miserable that mere words had come between them.

"You are wondering why the Instrumentality let you come here?"

He nodded again.

"I don't know either," said she, reaching out and taking his hand.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His hand felt and looked like the hairy paw of a giant as she held his right hand with her two pretty, well-kept little-girl hands; but the strength of her eyes and the steadfastness of her voice showed that it was she who was giving the reassurance, not he.

The child was helping *him?*

The idea was outrageous, impossible, true.

It was enough to alarm him, to make him begin to pull his hand away again. She clutched him with tender strength, and he could not resist her. Again he had the feeling, which had gripped him so strongly when he first met her at the door of Beauregard and failed to kill her, that he had always known her and had always loved her. (Was there not some planet on which eccentric people believed a weird cult, thinking that human beings were endlessly reborn with fragmentary recollections of their own previous human lives? It was almost like that here, now. He did not know the girl but he had always known her. He did not love the girl and yet he had loved her from the beginning of time.)

Said she, so softly that it was almost a whisper: "Wait. Your death may come through that door pretty soon and I will tell you how to meet it. But before

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that, I have to show you the most beautiful thing in the world."

Despite her little hand lying tenderly on his, Casher spoke irritably: "I'm tired of talking riddles here on Henriada. The Administrator gives me the mission of killing you and I fail in it. Then you promise me a battle and give me a good meal instead. Now you talk about the battle and start off with some other irrelevancy. You're going to make me angry if you keep on and, and —" he stammered at last — "and I get pretty useless if I'm angry. If you want me to fight for you, let me know the fight and let me go do it now. I'm willing enough."

Her remote, kind half-smile did not waver. "Casher," she said, "what I am going to show you is your most important weapon in the fight."

With her free left hand she tugged at the fine chain of a thin gold necklace. Some kind of jewelry came out of the top of her shift dress, where she had kept it hidden. It was the image of two pieces of wood with a man nailed to them.

Casher stared and then he burst into hysterical laughter.

"Now you've done it, ma'am," he cried. "I'm no use to you or to anybody else. I know what

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that is, and up to now I've just suspected it. It's what the robot, rat and Copt agreed on when they went exploring back in Space Three. It's the Old Strong Religion. You've put it in my mind and now the next person who meets me will peep it and will wipe it out. Me too, probably, along with it. That's no weapon. That's a defeat. You've done me in. I knew the sign of the Fish a long time ago, but I had a chance of getting away with just that little bit."

"Casher!" she cried. "Casher! Get hold of yourself. You will know nothing about this before you leave Beauregard. You will forget. You will be safe."

He stood on his feet, not knowing whether to run away, to laugh out loud, or to sit down and weep at the silly sad misfortune which had befallen him. To think that he himself had become brain-branded as a fanatic — forever denied travel between the stars — just because an undergirl had shown him an odd piece of jewelry!

"It's not as bad as you think," said the little girl, and stood up too. Her face peered lovingly at Casher's. "Do you think, Casher, that I am afraid?"

"No," he admitted.

"You will not remember this, Casher. Not when you leave. I am not just the turtle-girl T'ruth. I am also the imprint of the citizen Agatha. Have you ever heard of her?"

"Agatha Madigan?" He shook his head slowly. "No. I don't see how . . . No, I'm sure that I never heard of her."

"Didn't you ever hear the story of the Hechizera of Gonfalon?"

Casher looked surprised. "Sure I saw it. It's a play. A drama. It is said to be based on some legend of immemorial time. The 'space-witch' they called her, and she conjured fleets out of nothing by sheer hypnosis. It's an old story."

"Eleven hundred years isn't so long," said the girl. "Eleven hundred years, fourteen local months come next tonight."

"You weren't alive eleven hundred years ago," said Casher.

He stood up from the remains of their meal and wandered over toward the window. That terrible piece of religious jewelry made him uncomfortable. He knew that it was against all laws to ship religion from world to world. What would he do, what could he do, now that he had actually beheld an image of the God Nailed High? That was exactly the kind of contraband which the police and customs robots of hundreds of worlds were looking for.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Instrumentality was easy about most things, but the transplanting of religion was one of its hostile obsessions. Religions leaked from world to world anyhow. It was said that sometimes even the underpeople and robots carried bits of religion through space, though this seemed improbable. The Instrumentality left religion alone when it had a settled place on a single planet, but the Lords of the Instrumentality themselves shunned other people's devotional lives and simply took good care that fanaticism did not once more flare up between the stars, once again bringing wild hope and great death to all the mankinds.

And now, thought Casher, the Instrumentality has been good to me in its big impersonal collective way, but what will it do when my brain is on fire with forbidden knowledge?

The girl's voice called him.

"I have the answer to your problem, Casher," said she, "if you would only listen to me. I *am* the Hechizera of Gonfalon, at least I am as much as any one person can be printed on another. "

His jaw dropped as he turned back to her. "You mean that you, child, really are imprinted with this woman Agatha Madigan? Really imprinted?"

"I have all her skills, Casher," said the girl quietly, "and a few more which I have learned on my own."

"But I thought it was just a story!" said Casher. "If you're that terrible woman from Gonfalon, you don't need me. I'm quitting. Now."

Casher walked toward the door. Disgusted, finished, through. She might be a child, she might be charming, she might need help, but if she came from that terrible old story, she did not need him.

"Oh, no you don't," said she.

IX

Unexpected, she took her place in the doorway, barring it. In her hand was the image of the man on the two pieces of wood.

Ordinarily Casher would not have pushed a lady. Such was his haste that he did so this time. When he touched her, it was like welded steel; neither her gown nor her body yielded a thousandth of a millimeter to his strong hand and heavy push.

"And now what?" she asked gently.

Looking back, he saw that the real T'ruth, the smiling girl-woman, still stood soft and real in the window.

Deep within, he began to give

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

up; he had heard of hypnotists who could project, but he had never met anyone as strong as this.

She was doing it, but how was she doing it? Or was she doing it? The operation could be subvolitional. There might be some art carried over from her animal past which even her re-formed mind could not explain. Operations too subtle, too primordial for analysis. Or skills which she used without understanding.

"I project," she said.

"I see you do," he replied glumly and flatly.

"I do kinesthetics," she said. His knife whipped out of his bootsheath and floated in the air in front of him.

He snatched it out of the air instinctively. It wormed a little in his grasp, but the force on the knife was nothing more than he had felt when passing big magnetic engines.

"I blind," she said. The room went totally dark for him.

"I hear," he said, and prowled at her like a beast, going by his memory of the room and by the very soft sound of her breathing. He had noticed by now that the simulacrum of herself which she had put in the doorway did not make any sound at all, not even that of breathing.

He knew that he was near her. His fingertips reached out for her shoulder or her throat. He did not mean to hurt her, merely to show her that two could play at tricks.

"I stun," she said, and her voice came at him from all directions. It echoed from the ceiling, came from all five walls of the old odd room, from the open windows, from both the doors. He felt as though he were being lifted into space and turned slowly in a condition of weightlessness. He tried to retain self-control, to listen for the one true sound among the many false sounds, to trap the girl by some outside chance.

"I make you remember," said her multiple echoing voice.

For an instant he did not see how this could be a weapon, even if the turtle-girl had learned all the ugly tricks of the Hechizera of Gonfalon.

But then he knew.

He saw his uncle, Kuraf, again. He saw his old apartments vividly around himself. Kuraf was there. The old man was pitiable, hateful, drunk, horrible; the girl on Kuraf's lap laughed at him, Casher O'Neill, and she laughed at Kuraf too. Casher had once had a teenager's passionate concern with sex and at the same time he had a teenager's dreadful fear of all the unstated, invisible implications

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of what the man-woman relationship, gone sour, gone wrong, gone bad, might be. The present-moment Casher remembered the long-ago Casher, and as he spun in the web of T'ruth's hypnotic powers he found himself back with the ugliest memory he had: The killings in the palace at Mizzer.

The colonels had taken Kaheer itself, and they ultimately let Kuraf run away to the pleasure planet of Ttiolle.

But Kuraf's companions, who had debauched the old republic of the Twelve Niles, those people! They did not go. The soldiers, stung to fury, had cut them down with knives. Casher thought of the blood sticky on the floors, blood gushing purple into the carpets, blood bright red and leaping like a fountain when a white throat ended its last gurgle, blood turning brown where handprints had left it on marble tables. The warm palace, long ago, had gotten the sweet sick stench of blood all the way through it. The young Casher had never known that people had so much blood inside them, or that so much could pour out on the perfumed sheets, the tables still set with food and drink, or that blood could creep across the floor in growing pools as the bodies of the dead yielded up their last few nasty sounds and their terminal muscular spasms.

Before that day of Butchery had ended, one thousand, three hundred and eleven human bodies, ranging in age from two months to eighty-nine years, had been carried out of the palaces once occupied by Kuraf. Kuraf, under sedation, was waiting for a starship to take him to perpetual exile and Casher — Casher himself O'Neill! — was shaking the hand of Colonel Wedder, whose orders had caused all the blood. The hand was washed and the nails pared and cleaned, but the cuff of the sleeve was still rimmed with the dry blood of some other human being. Colonel Wedder either did not notice his own cuff, or he did not care.

"Touch and yield!" said a girl-voice out of nowhere.

Casher found himself on all fours in the room, his sight suddenly back again, the room unchanged, and T'ruth smiling.

"I fought you," she said.

He did not trust himself to speak.

He reached for his water-glass, looking at it closely to see if there were any blood on it.

Of course not. Not here. Not this time, not this place.

He pulled himself to his feet.

The girl has sense enough not to help him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She stood there in her thin modest shift, looking very much like a wise female child, while he stood up and drank thirstily. He refilled the glass and drank again.

Then, only then, did he turn to her and speak. "Do you do all that?"

She nodded.

"Alone. Without drugs or machinery?"

She nodded again.

"Child," he cried out, "you're not a person! You're a whole weapons system all by yourself. What are you, really. *Who are* you?"

"I am the turtle child T'ruth," she said, "and I am the loyal property and loving servant of my good master, the Mister and Owner Murray Madigan."

"Madame," said Casher, "you are almost a thousand years old. I am at your service. I do hope you will let me go free later on. And especially, that you will take that religious picture out of my mind."

As Casher spoke, she picked a locket from the table. He did not notice it. It was an ancient watch or a little round box, swinging on a thin gold chain.

"Watch this," said the child, "if you trust me, and repeat what I then say."

(Nothing at all happened: nothing — anywhere.)

Casher said to her, "You're making me dizzy, swinging that ornament. Put it back on. Isn't that the one you were wearing?"

"No, Casher, it isn't."

"What were we talking about?" demanded Casher.

"Something," said she. "Don't you remember?"

"No," said Casher brusquely. "Sorry, but I'm hungry again." He wolfed down a sweet roll encrusted with sugar and decorated with fruits. His mouth full, he washed the food down with water. At last he spoke to her. "Now what?"

She had watched with timeless grace.

"There's no hurry, Casher. Minutes or hours, they don't matter."

"Didn't you want me to fight somebody after Gosigo left me here?"

"That's right," she said, with terrible quiet.

"I seem to have had a fight right here in this room." He stared around stupidly.

She looked around the room, very cool. "It doesn't look as though anybody's been fighting here, does it?"

"There's no blood here, no blood at all. Everything is clean."

"Pretty much so."

"Then why," said Casher, "should I think I had a fight?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"This wild weather on Henriada sometimes upsets offworlders until they get used to it," said T'ruth mildly.

The old room with the golden-oak furniture swam around him. The world outside was strange with the sunlit marshes and wide bayous trailing off to the forever-thundering storm, just over the horizon, which lay beyond the weather machines. Casher shrugged and shivered. He looked straight at the girl. She stood erect and looked at him with the even regard of a reigning empress. Her young budding breasts barely showed through the thinness of her shift; she wore golden flat-heeled shoes. Around her neck there was a thin gold chain, but the object on the chain hung down inside her dress. It excited him a little to think of her flat chest barely budding into womanhood. He had never been a man who had an improper taste for children, but there was something about this person which was not child-like at all.

And around the edge of his mind there flickered up hot little torments of memory.

"Now I remember," he cried, "you have me here to kill somebody. You are sending me into a fight."

"You are going to a fight, Casher. I wish I could send somebody else, not you, but you are the only person here strong enough to do the job."

Impasively he took her hand. The moment he touched her, she ceased to be a child or an underperson. She felt tender and exciting, like the most desirable and important person he had ever known. His sister? But he had no sister. He felt he was himself terribly, unendurably important to her. He did not want to let her hand go, but she withdrew from his touch with an authority which no decent man could resist.

"You must fight to the death, now, Casher," she said, looking at him as evenly as might a troop commander examine a special soldier selected for a risky mission.

X

He nodded. He was tired of having his mind confused. He knew something had happened to him after the forgetty, Gosigo, had left him at the front door, but he was not at all sure of what it was.

They seemed to have had a sort of meal together in this room. He felt that he was in love with the child, though he knew that she was not even a human being. He remembered something about her living ninety thousand years and he re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

membered something else about her having gotten the name and the skills of the greatest battle hypnotist of all history, the Hechizera of Gonfalon. There was something strange, something frightening about that chain around her neck. There were things he had hoped he would never have to know.

He strained at the thought and it broke like a bubble.

"I'm a fighter," he said. "Give me my fight and let me know."

"*He* can kill you. I hope not . . . but you must not kill him. He is immortal and insane; but in the law of Old North Australia, from which my master, the Mister and Owner Murray Madigan, is an exile, we must not hurt a house guest, nor may we turn him away in a time of great need."

"What do I *do*?" snapped Casher impatiently.

"You fight him. Frighten him Make his poor crazy mind fearful that he will meet you again."

"I'm supposed to do this?"

"You can," she said very seriously. "I've already tested you. That's why you have the little spot of amnesia about this room."

"But *why*? Why bother? Why not get some of your human servants and have them tie him up or put him in a padded room?"

"They can't deal with him. He is too strong, too big, too clever, even though insane. Besides, they don't dare follow him."

"Where does he go?" said Casher sharply.

"Into the control room," replied T'ruth, as if it were the saddest phrase ever uttered.

"What's wrong with that? Even a place as fine as Beauregard can't have too much of a control room. Put locks on the control."

"It's not that kind of a control room."

Almost angry, he shouted, "What is it, then?"

"The control room," she answered, "is for a planoform ship. This house — These counties, all the way to Mottile on the one side and to Ambiloxi on the other — The sea itself, way out into the Gulf of Esperanza. All this is one ship."

Casher's professional interest took over. "If it's turned off, he can't do any harm."

"It's not turned off," she said. "My master leaves it on a very little bit. That way, he can keep the weather machines going and make this edge of Henriada a very pleasant place."

"You mean," said Casher, "that you'd risk letting a lunatic fly all these estates off into space."

"He doesn't even fly."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What does he *do*, then?" yelled Casher.

"When he gets at the controls, he just hovers."

"He hovers? By the Bell, girl, don't try to fool me. If you hover a place as big as this, you could wipe out the whole planet any moment. There have been only two or three pilots in the history of space who would be able to hover a machine like this one."

"He can, though," insisted the little girl.

"Who is he, anyhow?"

"I thought you knew. His name is John Joy Tree."

"Tree the Go-Captain?" Casher shivered in the warm room. "He died a long time ago after he made that record flight."

"He did not die. He bought immortality and went mad. He came here and he lives under my master's protection."

"Oh," said Casher. There was nothing else he would say. John Joy Tree, the great Norstrilian who took the first of the Long Plunges outside the galaxy; he was like Magno Taliano of ages ago, who could fly space on his living brain alone.

But fight him?

How could anybody fight him?

Pilots are for piloting; killers are for killing; women are for loving or forgetting. When you mix up the purposes, everything goes wrong.

Casher went down abruptly. "Do you have any more of that coffee?"

"You don't need coffee," she said.

He looked up inquiringly.

"You're a fighter. You need a war. That's it," she said, pointing with her girlish hand to a small doorway which looked like the entrance to a closet. "Just go in there. He's in there now, tinkering with the machines again. Making me wait for my master to get blown to bits at any minute! And I've put up with it for over a hundred years."

"Go yourself," he said.

"You've been in a ship's control room," she declared.

"Yes," he nodded.

"You know how people go all naked and frightened inside. You know how much training it takes to make a go-captain. What do you think happens to me?" At long last, her voice was shrill, angry, excited, childish.

"What happens?" said Casher dully, not caring very much; he felt weary in every bone. Useless battles, murder he had to try, dead people arguing after their ballads had already grown out of fashion. Why didn't the Hechizera of Gonfalon do her own work?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Catching his thought she screeched at him, "Because I can't!"

"All right," said Casher. "Why not?"

"*Because I turn into me.*"

A little startled, Casher said, "You what?"

"I'm a turtle child. My shape is human. My brain is big. But I'm a *turtle*. No matter how much my master needs me, I'm just a turtle."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"What do turtles do when they're faced with danger? Not underpeople-turtles, but real turtles, little animals. You must have heard of them somewhere."

"I've seen them," said Casher, "on some world or other. They pull into their shells."

"That's why I do," she wept, "when I sould be defending my master. I can meet most things. I am not a coward. But in that control room, I forget, forget!"

"Send a robot, then!"

She almost screamed at him. "A robot against John Joy Tree? Are you mad, too?"

Casher admitted, in a mumble, that on second thought it wouldn't do much good to send a robot against the greatest go-captain of them all. He concluded lamely, "I'll go, if you want me to."

"Go now," she shouted. "Go right in!"

She pulled at his arm, half-dragging and half-leading him to the little brightened door which looked so innocent.

"But — " he said.

"Keep going," she hissed. "This is all we ask of you. Don't kill him, but frighten him, fight him, wound him if you must. You can do it. I can't." She sobbed as she tugged at him. "I'd just be *me*."

Before he knew quite what had happened she opened the door. The light beyond was clear and light and tinged with blue, the way the skies of Manhome, Mother Earth, were shown in all the viewers.

He let her push him in through the door.

He heard the door click behind him.

Before he even took in the details of the room or noticed the man in the go-captain's chair, the flavoring and meaning of the room struck him like a blow against his throat.

This room, he thought, *is hell.*

He wasn't even sure that he remembered where he had learned the word "hell." It denoted all good turned to evil, all hope to anxiety, all wishes to greed.

Somehow, this room was it.

And then . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

XI

And then the chief occupant of hell turned and looked squarely at him.

If this was John Joy Tree, he did not look insane.

He was a handsome, chubby man with a red complexion, bright eyes, dancing-blue in color, and a mouth which was as mobile as the mouth of a temptress.

"Good day."

"How do you do?" said Casher inanely.

"I do not know your name," said the ruddy brick man, speaking in a tone of voice which was not the least bit insane.

"I am Casher O'Neill, from the city of Kaheer on the planet Mizzer."

"Mizzer?" laughed John Joy Tree. "I spent a night there, long, long ago. The entertainment was most unusual. But we have other things to talk about. You have come here to kill the undergirl T'ruth. You received your orders from the honorable Rankin Meiklejohn, may he soak in drink! The child has caught you and now she wants you to kill me, but she does not dare utter those words."

John Joy Tree, as he spoke, shifted the spaceship controls to stand-by, and got ready to get out of his captain's seat.

Casher protested, "She said nothing about killing you. She said you might kill me."

"I might, at that." The immortal pilot stood on the floor. He was a full head shorter than Casher but he was a strong and formidable man. The blue light of the room made him look clear, sharp, distinct.

The whole flavor of the situation tickled the fear-nerves inside Casher's body. He suddenly felt that he wanted very much to go to a bathroom, but he felt quite surely that if he turned his back on this man, in this place, he would die like a felled ox in a stockyard. He *had* to face John Joy Tree.

"Go ahead," said the pilot. "Fight me."

"I didn't say that I would fight you," said Casher. "I am supposed to frighten you and I do not know how to do it."

"This isn't getting us anywhere," said John Joe Tree. "Shall we go into the outer room and let poor little T'ruth give us a drink? You can just tell her that you failed."

"I think," said Casher, "that I am more afraid of her than I am of you."

John Joy Tree flung himself into a comfortable passenger's chair. "All right, then. Do something. Do you want to box? Glover? Bare fists? Or would

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you like swords? Or wirepoints? There are some over there in the closet. Or we can each take a pilot ship and have a ship-duel out in space."

"That wouldn't make much sense," said Casher, "me fighting a ship against the greatest go-captain of them all."

John Joy Tree greeted this with an ugly underlaugh, a barely audible sound which made Casher feel the whole situation was ridiculous.

"But I do have one advantage," said Casher. "I know who you are and you do not know who I am."

"How could I tell," said John Joy Tree, "when people keep on getting born all over the place?"

He gave Casher a scornful, comfortable grin. There was charm in the man's poise. Keeping his eyes focused directly on Casher, he felt for a carafe and poured himself a drink.

He gave Casher an ironic toast and Casher took it, standing frightened and alone. More alone than he had ever been before in his life.

Suddenly John Joy Tree sprang lightly to his feet and stared with a complete change of expression past Casher. Casher did not dare look around. This was some old fighting trick.

Tree spat out the words, "*You've* done it then! This time you will violate all the laws and kill me. This fashionable oaf is not just one more trick."

A voice behind Casher called softly, "I don't know." It was a man's voice, old, slow and tired.

Casher had heard no one come in.

Casher's years of training stood him in good stead. He skipped sidewise in four or five steps, never taking his eyes off John Joy Tree, until the other man had come into his field of vision.

The man who stood there was tall, thin, yellow-skinned and yellow-haired. His eyes were an old sick blue. He glanced at Casher and said:

"I'm Madigan."

Was this the master? thought Casher. Was this the being whom that lovely child had been imprinted to adore?

He had no more time for thought.

Madigan whispered, as if to no one in particular, "You find me waking. You find him sane. Watch out."

Madigan lunged for the pilot's controls, but his tall, thin old body could not move very fast.

John Joy Tree jumped out of his chair and ran for the controls too.

Casher tripped him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tree fell, rolled over, and got halfway up, one knee and one foot on the floor. In his hand there shimmered a knife very much like Casher's own.

Casher felt the flame of his body as some unknown force flung him against the wall. He stared, wild with fear.

Madigan had climbed into the pilot's seat and was fiddling with the controls as though he might blow Henriada out of space at any second. John Joy Tree glanced at his old host and then turned his attention to the man in front of him.

There was another man there.

Casher knew him.

He looked familiar.

It was himself, rising and leaping like a snake, left arm weaving the knife for the neck of John Joy Tree.

The image-Casher hit Tree with a thud that resounded through the room.

Tree's bright blue eyes had turned crazy-mad. His knife caught the image-Casher in the abdomen, thrust hard and deep, and left the young man gasping on the floor, trying to push the bleeding entrails back into his belly. The blood poured from the image-Casher all over the rug.

Blood!

Casher suddenly knew what he had to do and how he could do it — all without anybody telling him.

He created a third Casher on the far side of the room and gave him iron gloves. There was himself, unheeded against the wall; there was the dying Casher on the floor; there was the third, stalking toward John Joy Tree.

"Death is here," screamed the third Casher, with a voice which Casher recognized as a fierce crazy simulacrum of his own.

Tree whirled around. "You're not real," he said.

Image-Casher stepped around the console and hit Tree with an iron glove. The pilot jumped away, a hand reaching up to his bleeding face.

John Joy Tree screamed at Madigan, who was playing with the dials without even putting on the pinlighter helmet.

"You got her in here?" he screamed. "You got her in here with this young man! Get her out!"

"Who?" said Madigan softly and absentmindedly.

"T'ruth. That witch of yours. I claim guest-right by all the ancient laws. *Get her out.*"

The real-Casher, standing at the wall, did not know how he controlled the image-Casher with the iron gloves, but control him he did. He made him speak, in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a voice as frantic as Tree's own voice:

"John Joy Tree, I do not bring you death. I bring you blood. My iron hands will split your eyes. Blind sockets will stare in your face. My iron hands will split your teeth and break your jaw a thousand times, so that no doctor, no machine will ever fix you. My iron hands will crush your arms, turn your hands into living rags. My iron hands will break your legs. Look at the blood, John Joy Tree! There will be a lot more blood. You have killed me once. See that young man on the floor."

They both glanced at the first image-Casher, who had finally shuddered into death in the great rug. A pool of blood lay in front of the body of the youth.

John Joy Tree turned to the image-Casher and said to him, "You're the Hechizera of Gonfalon. You can't scare me. You're a turtle-girl and can't really hurt me."

"Look at me," said real-Casher.

John Joy Tree glanced back and forth between the duplicates.

Fright began to show.

Both the Cashers now shouted, in crazy voices which came from the depths of Casher's own mind:

"Blood you shall have! Blood and ruin. But we will not kill you. You will live in ruin, blind, emasculated, armless, legless. You will be fed through tubes. You cannot die and you will weep for death but no one will hear you."

"Why?" screamed Tree. "Why? What have I done to you?"

"You remind me," howled Casher, "of my home. You remind me of the blood poured by Colonel Wedder when the poor useless victims of my uncle's lust paid with their blood for his revenge. You remind me of myself, John Joy Tree, and I am going to punish you as I myself might be punished."

Lost in the mists of lunacy, John Joy Tree was still a brave man.

He flung his knife unexpectedly at real-Casher. Image-Casher, in a tremendous bound, leaped across the room and caught the knife on an iron glove. It clattered against the iron glove and then fell silent into the rug.

Casher saw what he had to see.

He saw the place of Kaheer, covered with death, with the intimate sticky silliness of sudden death — the dead men holding little packages they had tried to save, the girls, with their throats cut, lying in their own blood but with the lipstick still

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

even and the eyebrow-pencil still pretty on their dead faces. He saw a dead child holding a broken doll, looking like a broken doll itself. He saw these things and he made John Joy Tree see them too.

"You're a bad man." said John Joy Tree.

"I am very bad," said Casher.

"Will you let me go, if I never enter this room again?"

Image-Casher snapped off, both the body on the floor and the fighter with the iron gloves. Casher did not know how T'ruth had taught him the lost art of fighter-replication, but he had certainly done it well.

"The lady told me you could go."

"But who are you going to use," said John Joy Tree, calm, sad and logical, "for your dreams of blood if you don't use me?"

"I don't know," said Casher. "I follow my fate. Go now, if you do not want my iron gloves to crush you."

John Joy Tree trotted out of the room, beaten.

Only then did Casher, exhausted, grab a curtain to hold himself upright and look around the room freely.

The evil atmosphere had gone.

Madigan, old though he was, had locked all the controls on stand-by.

He walked over to Casher.

"Thank you. She did not invent you. She found you and put you to my service."

Casher coughed out, "The girl. Yes."

"*My* girl," corrected Madigan. "She could not have thought you up. She is my dead wife over again. The citizeness Agatha might have done it. But not T'ruth."

Casher looked at the man as he talked. The host wore the bottoms of some very cheap yellow pajamas and a washable bathrobe which had once been stripes of purple, lavender and white. Now it was faded, like its wearer. Casher also saw the white clean plastic surgical implants on the man's arms, where the machines and tubes hooked in to keep him alive.

"I sleep a lot," said Murray Madigan, "but I am still the master of Beauregard. I am grateful to you."

The hand was frail, withered, dry, without strength.

The old voice whispered: "Tell her to reward you. You can have anything on my estate. Or you can have anything on Henriada. She manages it all for me." Then the old blue eyes opened wide and sharp and Murray Madigan was once again the man, just momentarily, that he had been hundreds of years ago — a Norstrilian trader, sharp,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shrewd, wise and not unkind. He added sharply: "Enjoy her company. She is a good child. But do not try to take her."

"Why not?" said Casher, surprised at his own bluntness.

"Because if you do, she will die. She is *mine*. Imprinted to me. I had her made and she is mine. Without me she would die in a few days. Do not take her."

Casher saw the old man leave the room by a secret door. He left himself, the way he had come in. He did not see Madigan again for two days, and by that time the old man had gone far back into his cataleptic sleep.

XII

Two days later T'ruth took Casher to visit the sleeping Madigan.

"You can't go in there," said Eunice in a shocked voice. "*Nobody* goes in there. That's the master's room."

"I'm taking him in," said T'ruth calmly.

She had pulled a cloth-of-gold curtain aside and she was spinning the combination locks on a massive steel door. It was set in Daimoni material.

The maid went on protesting, "But even you, little ma'am, can't take him in there!"

"Who says I can't?" said T'ruth calmly and challengingly.

The awfulness of the situation sank in on Eunice.

In a small voice she muttered, "If you're taking him in, you're taking him in, but it's never been done before."

"Of course it hasn't Eunice, not in your time. But Casher O'Neill has already met the mister and owner. He has fought for the mister and owner. Do you think I would take a stray guest in to look at the master, just like that?"

"Oh, not at all, no," said Eunice.

"Then go away, woman," said the lady-child. "You don't want to see this door open, do you?"

"Oh, no," shrieked Eunice and fled, putting her hands over her ears as though that would shut out the sight of the door.

When the maid had disappeared, T'ruth pulled with her whole weight against the handle of the heavy door. Casher expected the mustiness of the tomb or the medicine-smell of a hospital; he was astonished when fresh air and warm sunlight poured out from that heavy, mysterious door. The actual opening was so narrow, so low, that Casher had to step sidewise as he followed T'ruth into the room.

The master's room was enormous. The windows were flooded with perpetual sunlight. The landscape outside must have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

been the way Henriada looked in its prime, when Mottile was a resort for the carefree millions of vacationers and Ambiloxi a port feeding worlds halfway across the galaxy. There was no sign of the ugly snaky storms which worried and pestered Henriada in these later years. Everything was landscape, order, neatness, the triumph of man, as though Turner had painted it.

The room itself, like the other great living-room of the estate of Beauregard, was an exuberant neo-baroque in which the architect, himself half-mad, had been given wild license to work out his fantasies in steel, plastic, plaster, wood and stone. The ceiling was not flat: it had a nave. The four corners of the room were each alcoves, cutting deep into the four sides, so that the room was in effect an octagon. The propriety and prettiness of the room had been a little diminished by the shoving of the furniture to one side, sofas, upholstered armchairs, marble tables and knicknack stands all in an indescribable melange to the left, while the right hand part of the room, facing the master window with the illusory landscape, was equipped like a surgery with an operating table, hydraulic lifts, bottles of clear and colored fluid hanging from chrome stands and two large devices which (Casher later surmised) must have been heart-lung and kidney machines.

The alcoves, in their turn, were wilder. One was an archaic funeral parlor with an immense coffin, draped in black velvet, resting on a heavy teak stand. The next was a spaceship control cabin of the old kind, with the levers, switches and controls all in plain sight — the meters actually read the galactically-stable location of this very place, and to do so they had to whirl mightily — as well as a pilot's chair with the usual choice of helmets and the straps and shock absorbers. The third alcove was a simple bedroom done in very old-fashioned taste, the walls a Wedgewood blue with deep wine-colored drapes, coverlets and pillowcases marking a sharp but tolerable contrast. The fourth alcove was the copy of a fortress. It might even be a fortress; the door was heavy and the walls looked as though they might be Daimoni material, indestructible by any imaginable means. Cases of emergency food and water were stacked against the walls. Weapons which looked oiled and primed stood in their racks, together with three different calibers of wirepoint.

The alcoves had no people in them.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The parlor was deserted.

The mister and owner Murray Madigan lay naked on the operating table. Two or three wires led to gauges attached to his body. Casher thought that he could see a faint motion of the chest, as the cataleptic man breathed at a rate one-tenth normal or less.

The girl-lady, T'ruth, was not the least embarrassed.

"I check him four or five times a day. I never let people in here. But you're special, Casher. He's talked with you and fought beside you and he knows that he owes you his life. You're the first human person ever to get into this room."

"I'll wager," said Casher, "that the Administrator of Henriada, the Honorable Rankin Meiklejohn, would give up some of his 'honorable' just to get in here and have one look around. He wonders what Madigan is doing when Madigan is doing nothing."

"He's not just doing nothing," said T'ruth sharply. "He's sleeping. It's not everybody who can sleep for forty or fifty or sixty thousand years and can wake up a few times a month, just to see how things are going."

Casher started to whistle and then stopped himself, as though he feared to waken the unconscious, naked old man. "So that's why he chose you."

T'ruth corrected him as she washed her hands vigorously in a wash-basin. "That's why he had me made. Turtle stock, three hundred years. Multiply that with intensive stroon treatments, three hundred times. Ninety thousand years. Then he had me printed to love him and adore him. He's not my master, you know. He's my god."

"Your what?"

"You heard me. Don't get upset. I'm not going to give you any illegal memories. I worship him. That's what I was printed for, when my little turtle eyes opened and they put me back in the tank to enlarge my brain and to make a woman out of me. That's why they printed every memory of the citizeness Agatha Madigan right into my brain. I'm what he wanted. Just what he wanted. I'm the most wanted being on any planet. No wife, no sweetheart, no mother has ever been wanted as much as he wants me now, when he wakes up and knows that I am still here. You're a smart man. Would you trust any machine — any machine at all — for ninety thousand years?"

"It would be hard," said Casher, "to get batteries of monitors long enough for them to repair each other over that long a time. But that means you have ninety thousand years of it. Four times,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

five times a day. I can't even multiply the numbers. Don't you ever get tired of it?"

"He's my love, he's my joy, he's my darling little boy," she carolled, as she lifted his eyelids and put colorless drops in each eye. Absentmindedly she explained, "With this slow a metabolism, there's always some danger that the eyelids will stick to his eyeballs. This is part of the checkup."

She tilted the sleeping man's head, looked earnestly into each eye. Then she stepped a few paces aside and put her face close to the dial of a gently humming machine. There was the sound of a shot. Casher almost reached for his gun, which he did not have.

The child turned back to him with a mischievous smile. "Sorry, I should have warned you. That's my noisemaker. I watch the encephalograph to make sure his brain keeps a little auditory intake. It showed up with the noise. He's asleep, very deeply asleep, but he's not drifting downward into death."

Back at the table she pushed Madigan's chin upward so that the head leaned far back on its neck. Deftly holding the forehead, she took a retractor, opened his mouth with her fingers, depressed the tongue and looked down into the throat.

"No accumulations there," she muttered, as if to herself.

She pushed the head back into a comfortable position. She seemed on the edge of another set of operations when it was obvious that an idea occurred to her. "Go wash your hands, thoroughly, over there, at the basin. Then push the timer down and be sure you hold your hands under the sterilizer until the timer goes off. You can help me turn him over. I don't have help here. You're the first visitor."

Casher obeyed and while he washed his hands he saw the girl drench her hands with some flower-scented unguent. She began to massage the unconscious body with professional expertness, even with a degree of roughness. As he stood with his hands under the sterilizer-drier, Casher marvelled at the strength of those girlish arms and those little hands. Indefatigably they stroked, rubbed, pummelled, pulled, stretched and poked the old body. The sleeping man seemed to be utterly unaware of it but Casher thought that he could see a better skin color and muscle tone appearing.

He walked back to the table and stood facing T'ruth.

A huge peacock walked across the imaginary lawn outside the window, his tail shimmering in a paroxysm of colors.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

XIII

T'ruth saw the direction of Casher's glance.

"Oh, I program that too. He likes it when he wakes up. Don't you think he was clever, before he went into catalepsis, to have me made? To have me created to love him and to care for him? It helps that I'm a girl. I can't ever love anybody but him, and it's easy for me to remember that this is the man I love. And it's safer for him. Any man might get bored with these responsibilities. I don't."

"Yet —" said Casher.

"Shh," she said, "wait a bit. This takes care." Her strong little fingers were now plowing deep into the abdomen of the naked old man. She closed her eyes so that she could concentrate all her senses on the one act of tactile impression. She took her hands away and stood erect. "All clear," she said. "I've got to find out what's going on inside him. But I don't dare use X-rays on him. Think of the radiation he'd build up in a hundred years or so. Here, now. You can help me turn him over, but watch the wires. Those are the monitor controls. They report his physiological processes, radio a message to me if anything goes wrong, and meanwhile supply the missing neurophysical impulses if any part of the automatic nervous system began to fade out or just simply went off."

"Has that ever happened?"

"Never," she said, "not yet. But I'm ready. Watch that wire — you're turning him too fast. There now, that's right. You can stand back while I massage him on the back."

She went back to her job of being a masseuse. Starting at the muscles joining the skull to the neck, she worked her way down the body, pouring ointment on her hands from time to time. When she got to his legs she seemed to work particularly hard. She lifted the feet, bent the knees, slapped the calves.

Her face cleared. "He's all right. He'll get along well for the next two hours. I'll have to give him a little sugar then. All he's getting now is normal saline."

She stood facing him. There was a faint glow in her cheeks from the violent exercise in which she had been indulging, but she still looked both the child and the lady — the child irrecoverably remote, hidden in her down wisdom from the muddled world of adults, and the lady, mistress in her own home, her own estates, her own planet, serving her master with almost immortal love.

"I was going to ask you, back there —" Casher started.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You were going to ask me?"

He spoke heavily. "I was going to ask you, what happens to you when he dies?"

"I couldn't care less," her voice sang out. He could see by the open, honest smile on her face that she meant it. "I'm *his*. I belong to *him*. That's what I'm *for*."

She passed Casher, almost pulled herself clear of the floor tugging on the great inside levers of the main door.

She gestured him past. He stooped and stepped through.

"Turn away again," she said. "All I'm going to do is to spin the dials, but they're cued to give any viewer a bad headache so he will forget the combination. Even robots. I'm the only person tuned to these doors."

He heard the dials spinning but he did not look around.

She murmured, almost under her breath, "I'm the only one. The only one."

They proceeded down a corridor, forgotten pictures hanging on the walls, unremembered luxuries left untouched by centuries of neglect.

The bright yellow light of Henriada poured in through an open doorway on their right. It must be a room, thought Casher, with its window open.

From the room came snatches of a man singing while playing a stringed instrument. Later, Casher found that this was a verse of the Henriada Song, the one which went:

Don't put your ship in the
Boom Lagoon,
Look up North for the raving
wave.
Henriada's boiled away
But Ambiloxi's a saving grave.

They entered the room.

A gentleman stood up to greet them. It was the great go-pilot, John Joy Tree. His ruddy face smiled, his bright blue eyes lit up, a little condescendingly, as he greeted his small hostess, but then his glance took in Casher O'Neill.

The effect was sudden, and evil.

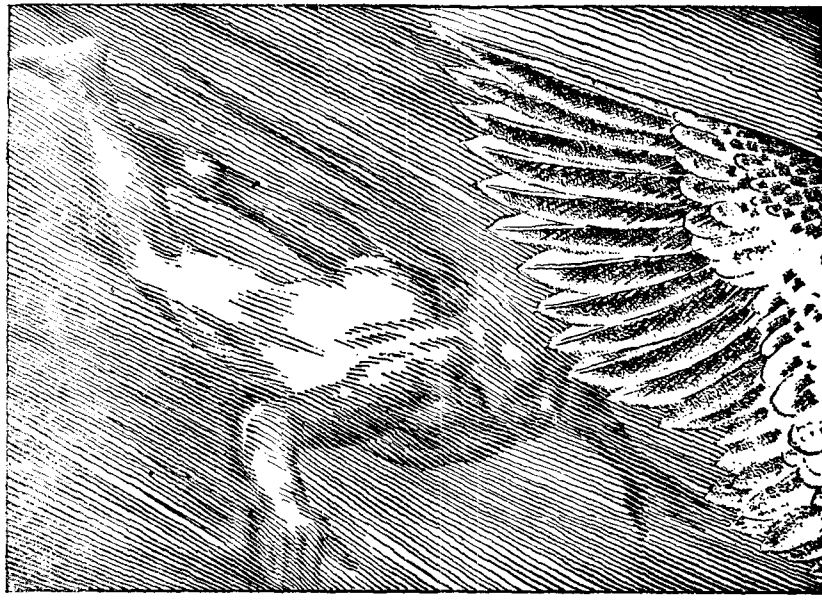
John Joy Tree looked away from both of them. The phrase which he had started to use stuck in his throat.

He said, in a different voice, very "away" and deeply troubled, "There is blood all over this place. There is a man of blood right here. Excuse me. I am going to be sick."

He trotted past them and out the door which they had entered.

"You have passed a test," said T'ruth. "Your help to my master has solved the problem of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



captain and honorable John Joy Tree. He will not go near that control room if he thinks that you are there."

"Do you have more tests for me? Still more? By now, you ought to know me well enough not to need tests."

"I am not a person," she said, "but just a built-up copy of one. I am getting ready to give you your weapon. This is a communications room as well as a music room. Would you like something to eat or drink?"

"Just water," he said.

"At your hand," said T'ruth.

A rock-crystal carafe had been standing on the table beside him, unnoticed. Or had she transported it into the room with one of the tricks of the Hechizera, the dreaded Agatha herself? It didn't matter. He drank. Trouble was coming.

XIV

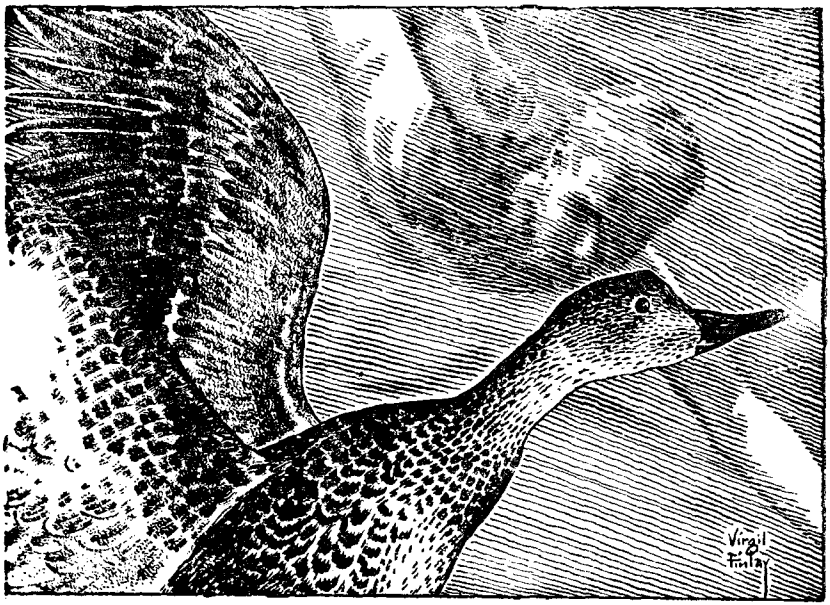
T'ruth had swung open a polished cabinet panel. The communicator was the kind they mount in planoforming ships right beside the pilot. The rental on one of them was enough to make any planetary government reconsider its annual budget.

"That's *yours*?" cried Casher.

"Why not?" said the little-girl lady. "I have four or five."

"But you're *rich!*"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



"I'm not. My master is. I belong to my master, too."

"But things like this. He can't handle them. How does he manage?"

"You mean money and things?" The girlish part of her came out. She looked pleased, happy and mischievous. "I manage them for him. He was the richest man on Henriada when I came here. He had credits of stroon. Now he is about forty times richer."

"He's a Rod McBan!" cried Casher.

"No, not even near. Mister McBan had a lot more money than we. But he's rich. Where do you think all the people from Henriada went?"

"I don't know," said Casher.

"To four new planets. They belong to my master and he charges the new settlers a very small land-rent."

"You bought them?" said Casher.

"For him," smiled T'ruth. "Haven't you heard of planet-brokers?"

"But that's a gambler's business!" said Casher.

"I gambled," she said, "and I won. Now keep quiet and watch me."

She pressed a button. "Instant message."

"Instant message," repeated the machine. "What priority?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"War news, double A one, subspace penalty."

"Confirmed," said the machine.

"The planet Mizzer. Now. War and peace information. Will fighting end soon?"

The machine clucked to itself.

Casher, knowing the prices of this kind of communication, almost felt that he could see the artificial spurt of money go out of Henriada's budget as the machines reached across the galaxy, found Mizzer and came back with the answer.

"Skirmishing. Seventh Nile. Ends three local days."

"Close message," said T'ruth.

The machine went off.

T'ruth turned to him. "You're going home soon, Casher, if you can pass a few little tests."

He stared at her and blurted, "I need my weapons, my cruiser and my laser."

"You'll have weapons. Better ones than those. Right now, I want you to go to the front door. When you have opened the door, you will not let anybody in. Close the door. Then please come back to me here, dear Casher, and if you are still alive, I will have some other things for you to do."

Casher turned in bewilderment. It did not occur to him to contradict her. He could end up a forgetty, like the maidservant Eunice or the Administrator's brown man, Gosigo.

Down the halls he walked. He met no one except for a few shy cleaning-robots who bowed their heads politely as he passed.

He found the front door. It stopped him. It looked like wood on the outside but it was actually a Daimoni door, made of near-indestructible material. There was no sign of a key or dials or controls. Acting like a man in a dream, he took a chance that the door might be keyed to himself. He put his right palm firmly against it, at the left or opening edge.

The door swung in.

Meiklejohn was there. Gosigo held the Administrator upright. It must have been a rough trip. The Administrator's face was bruised and there was a trickle of blood coming out of the corner of his mouth. His eyes focused on Casher.

"You're alive. She caught you too?"

Quite formally, Casher asked, "What do you want in this house?"

"I have come," said the Administrator, "to see her."

"To see whom?" insisted Casher.

The Administrator hung almost slack in Gosigo's arms. By his own standard and in his own

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

way, he was a very brave man indeed. His eyes looked clear even though his body was collapsing.

"To see T'ruth, if she will see me," said Rankin Meiklejohn.

Said Casher, "She cannot see you now. Gosigo!"

The forgetty turned to Casher and gave him a bow.

"You will forget me. You have not seen me."

"I have not seen you, Lord. Give my greetings to your lady. Anything else?"

"Yes. Take your master home, as safely and swiftly as you can."

"My lord!" cried Gosigo, though this was an improper title for Casher. Casher turned around.

"My lord, tell her to extend the weather machines for just a few more kilometers and I will have him home safe in ten minutes. At top speed."

"I can tell her," said Casher, "but I cannot promise she will do it."

"Of course," said Gosigo. He picked up the Administrator and began putting him into the ground car. Rankin Meiklejohn bawled once, like a man crying in paint. It sounded like a blurred version of the name *Murray Madigan*. No one heard it but for Gosigo and Casher; Gosigo busy closing the ground car, Casher pushing on the big house door.

The door clicked.

There was silence.

The opening of the door was remembered only by the warm sweet salty stink of seaweed which had disturbed the odor-pattern of the changeless, musty old house.

Casher hurried back with the message about the weather machines.

T'ruth received the message gravely. Without even looking at the console, she reached out and controlled it with her extended right hand while not taking her eyes off Casher for a moment. The machine clicked its agreement. T'ruth exhaled.

"Thank you, Casher. Now the Instrumentality and the forgetty are gone."

She stared at him, almost sadly and inquiringly. He wanted to pick her up, to crush her to his chest, to rain his kisses on her face. But he stood stock still. He did not move. This was not just the forever-loving turtle-child; this was the real mistress of Henriada. This was the Hechizera of Gonfalon, whom he had formerly thought about only in terms of a wild, melodic grand opera.

"I think you are seeing me, Casher. It is hard to see people,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

even when you look at them every day. I think I can see you, too, Casher. It is almost time for us both to do the things which we have to do."

"Which we *have* to do?" he whispered, hoping she might say something else.

"For me, my work here on Henriada. For you, your fate on your homeland of Mizzer. That's what life is, isn't it? Doing what you have to do in the first place. We're lucky people if we find it out. You are ready, Casher. I am about to give you weapons which will make bombs and cruisers and lasers and bombs seem like nothing at all."

"By the Bell, girl! Can't you tell me what those weapons are?"

T'ruth stood in her innocently revealing sheath, the yellow light of the old music room pouring like a halo around her.

"Yes," she said, "I can tell you now. Me."

Casher felt a wild surge of erotic attraction for the innocently voluptuous child. He remembered his first insane impulse to crush her with kisses, to sweep her up with hugs, to exhaust her with all the excitement which his masculinity could bring to both of them.

He looked.

She stood there, calm.

That sort of an idea did not ring right.

He was going to get her, but he was going to get something far from fun or folly — something, indeed, which he might not even like.

When at last he spoke, it was out of the deep bewilderment of his own thoughts, "What do you mean, you're going to give me yourself? It doesn't sound very romantic to me, nor the tone in which you said it."

The child stepped close to him, reaching up and patting his forehead.

"You're not going to get me for a night's romance, and if you did, you would be sorry. I am the property of my master and no other man. But I can do something with you which I have never done to anyone else. I can get myself imprinted on you. The technicians are already coming. You will be the turtle child. You will be the citizeness Agatha Madigan, the Hechizera of Gonfalon herself. You will be many other people — and yourself. You will then win. Accidents may kill you, Casher, but no one will be able to kill you on purpose. Not when you're me. Poor man! Do you know what you will be giving up?"

"What?" he croaked, at the edge of a great fright. He had seen danger before, but never danger from within himself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You will not fear death, ever again, Casher. You will have to lead your life minute by minute, second by second, and you will not have the alibi that you are going to die anyhow. You will know that's not special."

He nodded, understanding her words and scrabbling around his mind for a meaning.

"I'm a girl, Casher . . ."

He looked at her and his eyes widened. She was a girl — a beautiful, wonderful girl. But she was something more. She was the mistress of Henriada. She was the first of the underpeople really and truly to surpass humanity. To think that he had wanted to grab her poor little body. The body — ah, that was sweet! — but the power within it was the kind of thing that empires and religions are made of.

". . . and if you take the print of me, Casher, you will never lie with a woman without realizing that you know more about her than she does. You will be a seeing man among blind multitudes, a hearing person in the world of the deaf. I don't now how much fun romantic love is going to be to you after this."

Gloomily he said, "If I can free my home planet of Mizzer, it will be worth it. Whatever it is."

"You're not going to turn into a woman!" she laughed, "Nothing that easy. But you are going to get wisdom. And I will tell you the whole story of the Sign of the Fish before you leave here."

"Not that, please," he begged. "That's a religion and the Instrumentality would never let me travel again."

"I'm going to have you scrambled, Casher, so that nobody can read you for a year or two. And the Instrumentality is not going to send you back. *I am.* Through space-three."

"It'll cost you a fine, big ship to do it."

"My master will approve when I tell him, Casher. Now give me that kiss you have been wanting to give me. Perhaps you will remember something of it when you come out of scramble."

She stood there. He did nothing.

"Kiss me!" she commanded.

He put his arm around her. She felt like a big little girl. She lifted her face. She thrust her lips up toward his. She stood on tip-toe.

He kissed her the way a man might kiss a religious object. The heat and fierceness had gone out of his hopes.

He had not kissed a girl, but power — tremendous power and wisdom put into a single slight form.

"Is that the way your master kisses you?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She gave him a quick smile. "How clever of you! Yes, sometimes. Come along now. We have to shoot some children before the technicians are ready. It will give you a good last chance of seeing what you can do when you have become what I am. Come along, the guns are in the hall."

XV

They went down an enormous light-oak staircase to a floor which Casher had never seen before. It must have been the entertainment and hospitality center of Beauregard long ago, when the mister and owner Murray Madigan was himself young.

The robots did a good job of keeping away the dust and the mildew. Casher saw inconspicuous little air-driers placed at strategic places, so that the rich tooled leather on the walls would not spoil, so that the velvet barstools would not become slimy with mold, so that the pool tables would not warp nor the golf clubs go out of shape with age and damp. By the Bell, he thought, that man Madigan could have entertained a thousand people at one time in a place this size.

The gun-cabinet, now, that was functional. The glass shone. The velvet of oil showed on the steel and walnut of the guns. They were old earth models, very rare and very special. For actual fighting, people used the cheap artillery of the present time or wirepoints for close work. Only the richest and rarest of connoisseurs had the old earth weapons or could use them.

T'ruth touched the guard-robot and waked him.

The robot saluted, looked at her face and without further inquiry, opened the cabinet.

"Do you know guns?" said T'ruth to Casher.

"Wirepoints," he said. "Never touched a gun in my life."

"Do you mind using a learning-helmet, then? I could teach you hypnotically with the special rules of the Hechizera, but they might give you a headache or upset you emotionally. The helmet is neuro-electric and it has filters."

Casher nodded and saw his reflection nodding in the polished glass doors of the gun-cabinet. He was surprised to see how helpless and lugubrious he looked.

But it was true. Never before in his life had he felt that a situation swept over him, washed along like a great wave, left him with no choice and no responsibility. Things were her choice now, not his, and yet he felt that her power was benign,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

self-limited, restricted by factors at which he could no more than guess. He had come for one weapon — the cruiser which he had hoped to get from the Administrator Rankin Meiklejohn. She was offering him something else — psychological weapons in which he had neither experience nor confidence.

She watched him attentively for a long moment and then turned to the gun-watching robot.

"You're little Harry Hadrian, aren't you? The gun-watcher."

"Yes, ma'am," said the silver robot brightly, "and I'm owl-brained too. That makes me very bright."

"Watch this," she said, extending her arms the width of the gun cabinet and then dropping them after a queer flutter of her hands. "Do you know what that means?"

"Yes, ma'am," said the little robot quickly, the emotion showing in his toneless voice by the speed with which he spoke, not by the intonation. "It means you have-taken-over and I-am-off-duty! Can-I-go-sit-in-the-garden and look-at-the-live-things?"

"Not quite yet, little Harry Hadrian. There are some wind people out there now and they might hurt you. I have another errand for you first. Do you remember where the teaching helmets are?"

"Silver hats on the third floor in an open closet with a wire running to each hat? Yes."

"Bring one of those as fast as you can. Pull it loose very carefully from its electrical connection."

The little robot disappeared in a sudden, fast, gentle clatter up the stairs.

T'ruth turned back to Casher. "I am helping you. You don't have to look so gloomy about it."

"I'm not gloomy. The Administrator sent me here on a crazy errand, killing an unknown underperson. I find out that the person is really a little girl. Then I find out that she is not an underperson, but a frightening old dead woman, still walking around alive. My life gets turned upside down. All my plans are set aside. You propose to send me hope to fulfill my life's work on Mizzer. I've struggled for this, so many years! Now you're making it all come through, even though you are going to cook me through space-three to do it and throw in a lot of illegal religion and hypnotic tricks that I'm not sure I can handle. Now you tell me to come along — to shoot children with guns. I've never done anything like that in my life and yet I find myself obeying you.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I'm tired out, girl, tired out. If you have put me in your power, I don't even know it. I don't even want to know it."

"Here you are, Casher, on the ruined wet world of Henriada. In less than a week you will be recovering among the military casualties of Colonel Wedder's army. You will be under the clear sky of Mizzer, and the Seventh Nile will be near you, and you will be ready at long last to do what you have to do. You will have bits and pieces of memories of me. Not enough to make you find your way back here or to tell people all the secrets of Beauregard, but enough for you to remember that you have been loved. You may even —" and she smiled very gently, with a tender wry humor on her face — "marry some Mizzer girl because her body or her face or her manner reminds me to you."

"In a week?" he gasped.

"Less than that."

He cried out, "Who are that you, an underperson, should run real people and manipulate their lives?"

"I didn't look for power, Casher. Power doesn't usually work if you look for it. I have eighty-nine thousand years to live, Casher, and as long as my master lives, I shall love him and take care of him. Isn't he handsome? Isn't he wise? Isn't he the most perfect master you ever saw?"

Casher thought of the old ruined-looking body with the plastic knobs set into it; he thought of the faded pajama bottoms; he said nothing.

"You don't have to agree," said T'ruth. "I know I have a special way of looking at him. But they took my turtle brain and raised the IQ to above normal human level. They took me when I was a happy little girl, enchanted by the voice and the glance and the touch of my master. They took me to where this real woman lay dying and they put me into a machine and they put her into one too. When they were through, they picked me up. I had on a pink dress with pastel blue socks and pink shoes. They carried me out into the corridor, on a rug. They had finished with me. They knew that I wouldn't die. I was healthy. Can't you see it, Casher. I cried myself to sleep, nine hundred years ago."

Casher could not really answer. He nodded sympathetically.

"I was a girl, Casher. Maybe I was a turtle once, but I don't remember that, any more than you remember your mother's womb or your laboratory bottle.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In that one hour I was never to be a girl again. I did not need go to school. I had *her* education, and it was a good one. She spoke twenty or more languages. She was a psychologist and a hypnotist and a strategist. She was also the tyrannical mistress of this house. I cried because my childhood was finished, because I knew what I would have to do. I cried because I knew that I could do it. I *loved* my master so, but I was no longer to be the pretty little servant who brought him his tablets or his sweetmeats or his beer. Now I saw the truth. As she died I had myself become Henriada. The planet was mine, to care for, to manage, to protect my master. If I come along and I protect and help you, is that so much for a woman who will just be growing up when your grandchildren will all be dead of old age?"

"No, no," stammered Casher O'Neill. "But your own life? A family, perhaps?"

Anger lashed across her pretty face. Her features were the features of the delicious girl-child T'ruth, but her expression was that of the citizeness Agatha Madigan, perhaps, a worldly woman reborn to the endless worldliness of her own wisdom.

"Should I order a husband from the turtle bank, perhaps? Should I hire out a piece of my master's estate, to be sold to somebody because I'm an underperson, or perhaps put to work somewhere in an industrial shop? I'm *me*. I may be animal, but I have more civilization in me than all the wind-people on this planet. Poor things! What kind of people are they, if they are only happy when they catch a big mutated duck and tear it to pieces, eating it raw? I'm not going to lose, Casher. I'm going to win. My master will live longer than any person has ever lived before. He gave me that mission when he was strong and wise and well in the prime of his life. I'm going to do what I was made for, Casher, and you're going to go back to Mizzer and make it free, whether you like it or not!"

They both heard a happy scurrying on the staircase.

The small silver robot, little Harry Hadrian, burst upon them; he carried a teaching helmet.

T'ruth said, "Resume your post. You are a good boy, little Harry, and you can have time to sit in the garden later on, when it is safe."

"Can I sit in a tree?" said the little robot.

"Yes, if it is safe."

Little Harry Hadrian resumed his post by the gun cabinet. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

kept the key in his hand. It was a very strange key, sharp at the end and as long as an awl. Casher supposed that it must be one of the straight magnetic keys, cued to its lock by a series of magnetized patterns.

"Sit on the floor for a minute," said T'ruth to Casher, "you're too tall for me." She slipped the helmet on his head, adjusted the levers on each side so that the helmet sat tight and true upon his skull.

With a touching gesture of intimacy, for which she gave him a sympathetic apologetic little smile, she moistened the two small electrodes with her own spit, touching her finger to her tongue and then to the electrode. These went to his temples.

She adjusted the verniered dials on the helmet itself, lifted the rear wire and applied it to her forehead.

Casher heard the click of a switch.

"That did it," he heard T'ruth's voice saying, very far away.

He was too busy looking into the gun cabinet. He knew them all and loved some of them. He knew the feel of their stocks on his shoulder, the glimpse of their barrels in front of his eyes, the dance of the target on their various sights, the welcome heavy weight of the gun on his supporting arm, the rewarding thrust of the stock against his shoulder when he fired. He knew all this, and did not know how he knew it.

"The Hechizera, Agatha herself, was a very accomplished sportswoman," murmured T'ruth to him. "I thought her knowledge would take a second printing when I passed it along to you. Let's take these."

She gestured to little Harry Hadrian who unlocked the cabinet and took out two enormous guns which looked like the long muskets mankind had on earth even before the age of space began.

"If you're going to shoot children," said Casher with his newfound expertness, "these won't do. They'll tear the bodies completely to pieces."

T'ruth reached into the little bag which hung from her belt. She took out three shotgun shells. "I have three more," she said. "Six children is all we need."

Casher looked at the slug projecting slightly from the shotgun casing. It did not look like any shell he had ever seen before. The workmanship was unbelievably fine and precise.

"What are they? I never saw these before."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Proximity stunners," she said. "Shoot ten centimeters above the head of any living thing and the stunner knocks it out."

"You want the children alive?"

"Alive, of course. And unconscious. They are a part of your final test."

XVI

Two hours later, after an exciting hike to the edge of the weather controls, they had the six children stretched out on the floor of the great hall. Four were little boys, two girls; they were fine-boned, soft-haired people, very thin, but they did not look too far from earth-normal.

T'ruth called up a doctor-underman from among her servants. There must have been a crowd of fifty or sixty undermen and robots standing around. Far up the staircase, John Joy Tree stood hidden, half in shadow. Casher suspected that he was as inquisitive as the others but afraid of himself, Casher, "the man of blood."

T'ruth said quietly but firmly to the doctor. "Can you give them a strong euphoric before you waken them? We don't want to have to pluck them out of all the curtains in the house, if they go wild when they wake up."

"Nothing simpler," said the doctor-underman. He seemed to be of dog origin but Casher could not tell.

He took a glass tube and touched it to the nape of each little neck. The necks were all streaked with dirt. These children had never been washed in their lives, except by the rain.

"Wake them," said T'ruth.

The doctor stepped back to a rolling table. It gleamed with equipment. He must have preset his devices, because all he did was to press a button and the children stirred into life.

The first reaction was wildness. They got ready to bolt. The biggest of the boys, who by earth-standards would have been about ten, got three steps before he stopped and began laughing.

T'ruth spoke the Old Common Tongue to them, very slowly and with long spaces between the words:

"Wind-children . . . do . . . you . . . know . . . where . . . you . . . are?"

The biggest girl twittered back to her so fast that Casher could not understand it.

T'ruth turned to Casher and said, "The girl said that she is in the Dead Place, where the air never moves and where the Old Dead Ones move around on their own business. She means us." To the wind-children she spoke again.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What . . . would . . . you . . . like . . . most?"

The biggest girl went from child to child. They nodded agreement vigorously. They formed a circle and began a little chant. By the second repetition around, Casher could make it out.

Shig — shag — shuggery
shuck shuck shuck!
What all of us need is
an all-around duck.
Shig — shag — shuggery,
shuck shuck shuck!

At the fourth of fifth repetition they all stopped and looked at T'ruth who was so plainly the mistress of the house.

She in turn spoke to Casher O'Neill: "They think that they want a tribal feast of raw duck. What they are going to get is inoculations against the worst diseases of this planet, several duck meals, and their freedom again. But they need something else beyond all measure. *You know what that is, Casher, if you can only find it.*"

The whole crowd turned its eyes on Casher, the human eyes of the people and underpeople, the milky lenses of the robots.

Casher stood aghast.

"Is this a test?" he said

"You could call it that," said T'ruth, looking away from him.

Casher thought furiously and rapidly. It wouldn't do any good to make them into forgetties. The household had enough of them. T'ruth had announced a plan to let them loose again. Mister and owner Murray Madigan must have told her, sometime or other, to "do something" about the wind people. She was trying to do it. The whole crowd watched him. What might T'ruth expect?

The answer came to him in a flash.

If she were asking *him*, it must be something to do with himself. Something which he — uniquely among these people, underpeople and robots — had brought to the storm-sieged mansion of Beauregard.

Suddenly he saw it.

"Use me, my lady Ruth," said he, deliberately giving her the wrong title, "to print on them nothing from my intellectual knowledge, but everything from my emotional makeup. It would not do them any good to know about Mizzer, where the Twelve Niles work their way down across the Intervening Sands. Nor about Pontoppidan, the Gem Planet. Nor about Olympia, where the blind brokers promenade under numbered clouds. Knowing things would not help these children. But *wanting* —"

Wanting things was different.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He was unique. He had wanted to return to Mizzer. He had wanted return beyond all dreams of blood and revenge. He had wanted things fiercely, wildly, so that even if he could not get them, he zig-zagged the galaxy in search of them.

T'ruth was speaking to him again, urgently and softly, but not in so low a voice that the others in the room could not hear.

"And what, Casher O'Neill, should I give them from you?" she asked softly.

"My emotional structure. My determination. My desire. Nothing else. Give them that and throw them back into the winds. Perhaps if they want something fiercely enough, they will grow up to find out what it is."

There was a soft murmur of approval around the room.

T'ruth hesitated a moment and then nodded. "Casher, you answered quickly and perceptively. Bring seven helmets, Eunice. Stay here, doctor."

Eunice, the forgetty, left, taking two robots with her.

"A chair," said T'ruth to no one in particular. "For him."

A large powerful underman pushed his way through the crowd and dragged a chair to the end of the room.

T'ruth gestured that Casher should sit in it.

She stood in front of him. Strange, thought Casher, that she should be a great lady and still a little girl. How could he ever find a girl like her? He was not even afraid of the mystery of the Fish, or the image of the man on two pieces of wood. He no longer dreaded space-three, where so many travellers had gone in and so few had come out. He felt safe, comforted by her wisdom and authority. He felt that he would never see the like of this again — a child running a planet and doing it well, a half-dead man surviving through the endless devotion of his maidservant, a fierce woman hypnotist living on with all the anxieties and angers of humanity gone but with the skill and obstinacy of turtle genes to sustain her in her reimprinted form.

"I can guess what you are thinking," said T'ruth, "but we have already said the things that we had to say. I've peeped into your mind a dozen times and I know that you want to go back to Mizzer so bad that space-three will spit you out right at the ruined fort where the big turn of the Seventh Nile begins. In my own way I love you, Casher, but I could not keep you here without turning you into a forgetty and making you a servant to my master. You know what

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

always comes first with me, and always will."

"Madigan."

"Madigan," she answered, and with her voice the name itself was a prayer.

Eunice came back with the helmets.

"When we are through with these, Casher, I'll have them take you to the conditioning room. Good-by, my might have been."

In front of everyone, she kissed him full on the lips.

He sat in the chair, full of patience and contentment. Even as his vision blacked out, he could see the thin light sheath of a smock on the girlish figure, he could remember the tender laughter lurking in her smile.

In the last instant of his consciousness, he saw that another figure had joined the crowd — the tall old man with the worn bathrobe, the faded blue eyes, the thin yellow hair. Murray Madigan had risen from his private-life-in-death and had come to see the last of Casher O'Neill. He did not look weak, nor foolish. He looked like a great man, wise and strange in ways beyond Casher's understanding.

There was the touch of T'ruth's little hand on his arm and everything became a velvety cluttered dark quiet inside his own mind.

When he awoke, he lay naked and sunburned under the hot sky of Mizzer. Two soldiers with medical patches were rolling him on to a canvas litter.

"Mizzer!" he cried to himself. His throat was too dry to make a sound. "I'm home."

Suddenly the memories came to him and he scrabbled and snatched at them, seeing them dissolve within his mind before he could get paper to write them down.

Memory: there was the front hall, himself getting ready to sleep in the chair, with the old giant of a Murray Madigan at the edge of the crowd and the tender light touch of T'ruth — his girl, his girl, now uncountable light-years away — putting her hand on his arm.

Memory: there was another room, with stained glass pictures and incense, and the weepworthy scenes of a great life shown in frescoes around the wall. There were the two pieces of wood and man in pain nailed to them. But Casher knew that scattered and coded through his mind, there was the ultimate and undefeatable wisdom of the sign of the Fish. He knew he could never fear fear again.

Memory: there was a gaming table in a bright room, with the wealth of a thousand worlds being raked toward him. He was a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

woman, strong, big-busted, bejewelled and proud. He was Agatha Madigan, winning at the games. (That must have come, he thought, when they printed me with T'ruth.) And in that mind of the Hechizera, which was now his own mind too, there was clear sure knowledge of how he could win men and women, officers and soldiers, even underpeople and robots, to his cause without a drop of blood or a word of anger.

The man, lifting him on the litter, made red waves of heat and pain roll over him.

He heard one of them say, "Bad case of burn. Wonder how he lost his clothes?"

The words were matter-of-fact; the comment was nothing special; but the cadence, that special cadence, was the true speech of Mizzer.

As they carried him away he remembered the face of Rankin Meiklejohn, enormous eyes staring with inward despair over the brim of a big glass. That was the Administrator, on Henriada. That was the man who sent him past Ambiloxi to Beauregard at two seventy-five in the morning. The litter jolted a little.

He thought of the wet marshes of Henriada and knew that soon he would never remember them again. The worms of the tornadoes creeping up to the edge of the estate. The mad wise face of John Joy Tree.

Space-three? Space-three? Already, even now, he could not remember how they had put him into space-three.

And space-three itself —

All the nightmares which mankind has ever had pushed into Casher's mind. He twisted once in agony, just as the litter reached a medical military cart. He saw a girl's face — what *was* her name? — and then he slept.

XVII

Fourteen Mizzer days later, the first test came.

A doctor colonel and an intelligence colonel, both in the workaday uniform of Colonel Wedder's Special Forces, stood by his bed.

"Your name is Casher O'Neill and we do not know how your body fell among the skirmishers," the doctor was saying, roughly and emphatically. Casher O'Neill turned his head on the pillow and looked at the man.

"Say something more!" he whispered to the doctor.

The doctor said, "You are a political intruder and we do not know how you got mixed up among our troops. We do not even know how you got back loose among the people of this planet."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The intelligence colonel standing beside him, nodded agreement.

"Do you think the same thing, Colonel?" whispered Casher O'Neill to the intelligence colonel.

"I ask questions. I don't answer them," said the man gruffly.

Casher felt himself reaching for their minds with a kind of fingertip which he did not know he had. It was hard to put into ordinary words, but it felt as though someone had said to him, "That one is vulnerable at the left forefront area of his consciousness, but the other one is well armored and must be reached through the midbrain." Casher was not afraid of revealing anything by his expression. He was too badly burned and in too much pain to show nuances of meaning on his face. (Somewhere he had heard of the wild story of the Hechizera of Gonfalon! Somewhere endless storms boiled across ruined marshes under a cloudy yellow sky! But where, when, what was that . . .? He could not take time off for memory. He had to fight for his life.)

"Peace be with you," he whispered to both of them.

"Peace be with you," they responded in unison, with some surprise.

"Lean over me, please," said Casher, "so that I do not have to shout."

They stood stock straight.

Somewhere in the resources of his own memory and intelligence Casher found the right note of pleading which could ride his voice like a carrier wave and make them do as he wished.

"This is Mizzer," he whispered.

"Of course this is Mizzer," snapped the intelligence colonel, "and you are Casher O'Neill. What are you doing here?"

"Lean over, gentlemen," he said softly, lowering his voice so that they could barely hear him.

This time they did lean over.

His burned hands reached for their hands. The officers noticed it, but since he was sick and unarmed, they let him touch them.

Suddenly he felt their minds glowing in his as brightly as if he had swallowed their gleaming, thinking brains at a single gulp.

He spoke no longer.

He *thought* at them—torrential, irresistible thought.

I am not Casher O'Neill. You will find his body in a room, four doors down. I am the civilian Bindaoud.

The two colonels stared, breathing heavily. Neither said a word.

Casher went on: "Our finger-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

prints and records have gotten mixed. Give me the fingerprints and papers of the dead Casher O'Neill. Bury him then, quietly, but with honor. Once he loved your leader and there is no point in stirring up wild rumors about returns from out of space. I am Bindaoud. You will find my records in your front office. I am not a soldier. I am a civilian technician doing studies on the salt in blood chemistry under field conditions. You have heard me, gentlemen. You hear me now. You will hear me always. But you will not remember this, gentlemen, when you awaken. I am sick. You can give me water and a sedative."

They still stood, enraptured by the touch of his hands.

Casher O'Neill said, "Awaken."

Casher O'Neill let go their hands.

The medical colonel blinked and said amiably, "You'll be better, mister and doctor Bindaoud. I'll have the orderly bring you water and a sedative."

To the other officer he said, "I have an interesting corpse four doors down. I think you had better see it."

They left, talking.

Casher O'Neill tried to think of the recent past, but the blue light of Mizzer was all around him, the sand-smell, the sound of horses galloping. For a moment he thought of a big child's blue dress and he did not know why he almost wept.

— CORDWAINER SMITH

Philip Jose Farmer's Greatest Story

DAY OF THE GREAT SHOUT

Don't miss this thrilling complete short novel by the author of The Lovers and many other great sf stories!

Philip K. Dick
R. S. Richardson
Theodore L. Thomas
— and many others

All in the January Worlds of Tomorrow — on sale now!

ON THE STORM PLANET

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A FLASK OF FINE ARCTURAN

by C. C. MacAPP

Here's the way to succeed in business — or in spite of it!

Date: April 29, 2017.
From: President.
To: Vice Presidents, Regional Managers.
Subject: Loose handling of information.

The Chairman of the Board has asked me to call to your attention a disturbing laxity in the handling of proprietary Company information. There has been too much casual discussion of Company plans, expenditures, technical processes and formulas. The Chariman and the rest of the Board were quite disturbed that a competitive distiller was able to learn in advance of publication details of our newest advertising campaign based on the virtues of our splendid new hardwood whiskey bottles. This leak of information will force us to spend additional millions of dollars educating the public to the fact that only our particular wooden container, with its special wood and unique interior design, confers the benefits described.

We of course want to maintain and promote interdepartmental co-operation and smooth working relationships, but it is considered desirable that there be less fraternization between personnel of different departments. Naturally this will have to be approached with tact and sublety.

In particular, Technical per-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sonnel must stop casually revealing details of secret processes and materials to Sales personnel. Accounting and Sales must stop discussing selling prices, mark-ups, salaries, commissions, etc., with Production and with Research. And Purchasing must stop revealing potential or actual fluctuations in raw material markets, to Sales and Production. This constant hubbub of gossip creates anxieties and dissatisfactions and is definitely inimical to the best interests of Interstellar Distilleries, Inc.

The Chairman and I want you to give this your personal attention and to enlist tactfully the co-operation of your department heads and managers.

Cordially,
Ellingsworth J. Pough, President.

Date: May 12,, 2017.
From: Hdqtrs. Purchasing.
To: Production Manager, Arcturus V.
Subject: Requisition for Pencils. No. V-744-6-2129.

No doubt subject requisition become garbled in the sub-space transmission. As received, it calls for 500,000 lead pencils, medium soft, cedar, yellow lacquered, with red rubber erasers. How many new pencils did you actually want?

I. Haggel.

Date: May 14, 2017.
From: Production Manager, Arcturus V.
To: Hdqtrs. Purchasing.
Subject: Requisition for pencils.

Half a million was right. However, under separate cover I am entering an additional requisition for another half million, along with ten dozen pencil sharpeners, you know, the kind you fasten on the wall. Make sure they're good quality so they won't wear out. It doesn't matter what color the sharpeners are, but make sure the pencils are exactly as requisitioned, and that the whole shipment gets here by the date specified.

Otto Stehdenbed,
Prod. Mgr.

Date: May 17, 2017.
From Hdqtrs. Purchasing.
To: Production Manager, Arcturus V.
Subject: Pencils.
We are still not sure we have the figures right, and if we do, we do not think we can approve the requisition. What possible use could you have for that many pencils and sharpeners?

I. Haggel.

Date: May 19, 2017.
From: Production Manager, Arcturus V.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To: Hdqtrs. Purchasing, Att'n I. Haggel.
Subject: Delayed requisition. and obstructionist tactics.

If you can't okay the pencils yourself, get the Old Man to do it, and while you're talking to him inform him that the first month's quota of wooden bottles won't be met because you're diddling around with my requisitions. Also ask him to explain to you why my reason for wanting the pencils is none of your damned business. As for the sharpeners, I want them to sharpen the pencils with.

O. Stehdenbed.

Date: May 20, 2017.
From: Shipping Dept., Earth.
To: Production Manager, Arcturus V.
Subject: Rush shipment. ON 20-17-V-93952.

We are shipping this morning, special express, your order for one million pencils and ten dozen sharpeners. It is costing the Company seventeen thousand dollars extra to get these to you by the date demanded. If you had taken the trouble to enter your order a few days earlier, we could have shipped by regular freight.

E. O. Hippus,
Shipping Clerk.

Date: May 25, 2017.
From: Director of Research
To: Production Manager, Arcturus V.
Subject: Request for Development of New Process. Refer NP D No. V-2016-37.

I have your memorandum inquiring as to progress on subject project.

It has been less than thirteen months since you entered this request. Considerable laboratory time has been expended on this project, and a number of promising leads developed. However, press of other work (you yourself have several other requests in) coupled with personnel shortages and a limited budget, have delayed the project. Would you like us to assign it an "A" priority, or perhaps a "B"?

This project deals with a process for hollowing out wooden blocks, leaving a rather complex inner surface. It is regrettable that you find it necessary to be so uninformative as to the process you are currently using. (We presume that this is something you already have in production.) It would help immeasurably if you could at least inform us as to the finished product involved. We can only conjecture from the incomplete specifications you supplied that it is some kind of a food container. If so, you should so advise us so that we may start getting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

clearance from the Federal and Interstellar Food and Drug Administrations. We are sure you are well acquainted with this Company's liabilities in regard to edible products.

We find that we have used up all the sample blocks of wood you sent us. Since you specify that no other wood is satisfactory, could you send us another supply?

I. Ben Dopenoff, Ph. D
Director of Research.

Date: May 28, 2017.
From: Director of Sales.
To: President.
Subject: Wooden Bottles Program.

As you know, E. J., we are ready to hit the market with this thing. TV and Feely-Smelly space is all hired, and everything's ready to go, and it's unthinkable that we should fall on our faces now by not having the product ready on time.

I was asking Otto out on Arcturus when the shipment of bottles is coming in. Attached is a photostat of his reply, which seems to reflect a negative attitude. I know you'll grasp the seriousness of this at once, and will want to make your own inquiries.

Goodwin Grype.

Date: June 2, 2017.
From: Production Manager, Arcturus V.
To: President.
Subject: Goddam wooden bottles.

Yes boss they'll be there.

Otto.

Date: June 3, 2017.
From: Headquarters Accounting.
To: Production Manager, Arc-Turus V.
Subject: Pencils and Sharpeners.

As you know, such items as office supplies must be accounted under Supervisory Overhead. You have erroneously reported a month's usage of pencils and sharpeners under Production Costs.

We are returning your Monthly Operating Report for May, 2017. Please file a Corrected Report promptly so we can clear your books for May.

D. U. Plicate.

Date: June 6, 2017.
From: Special Field Representative. (Confidential).
To: President (personal).
Subject: Production Manager, Arcturus V.

E. J.: Otto acting oddly. You may have to replace him. I'll be in with a verbal report day after tomorrow.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Date: June 8, 2017.
From: President.
To: Production Manager, Arcturus V.
Subject: Arcturus operations.

Otto, what's going on? WHAT IN HELL'S A PENCILBURGER?

Date: June 8, 2017.
From: Vice President in charge of Efficiency Cost Examination.
To: President.
Subject: Savings, office supplies.

E. J.: I'm rather proud of some savings we've been able to effect lately, and I'm sure you'll appreciate having one particularly substantial item called to your attention.

Some of our divisions have been using considerable numbers of lead pencils. Working with our suppliers, I was able to find a new experimental pencil, just coming into production, which is nearly nine per cent cheaper in wholesale lots. Instead of being made from prime solid cedar, this new pencil has a composition moulded around the lead, made from ground waste wood with a synthetic glue binder. As I understand it, the saving results from the use of the the substitution of moulding for the old cutting and shaping processes.

We are always alert for opportunities to reduce costs and thus augment our profits. I think we can be forgiven a little pride when we are as successful as we have been in this case.

I.C. Abuck,
Vice President.

Date: June 11, 2017.
From: Ex-Production Manager, Arcturus V.
To: President.
Subject: Pencilburgers.

Enclosed is my resignation, which I am completing while I'm still able to write.

First of all, let me inform you that your shipment of 250,000 wooden bottles will *not* arrive on schedule. They are all ready to go, but I think when you hear about them you won't want to waste shipping costs. We may as well leave them here.

Secondly, I'll explain about the pencilburgers. It's very simple. The only way to make the damned bottles is the way the original samples were made. (If I'd known how those were made, I'd never have come out here.) The dominant race on Arcturus V is a race of intelligent termites, about two inches long. That is, the individuals are two inches long. They produce and trade around the galaxy all sorts of carved wooden goods. They're very artistic, and good scientists too in their way. The wooden bottles they make have just the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

right chemistry, and some damned thing in the pattern of their inner surfaces, to give whiskey the mellowness and special boost we advertise.

As you may or may not know, we've been trying for a year to get Research off its fanny to develop some mechanical way of hollowing out the bottles, but they haven't come up with anything, so when the deadline got close I went ahead and contracted with the termites to have them do the work. We take a block of wood and shape it on the outside, then they eat their way in through the neck and shape it on the inside the way its supposed to be.

About four months ago I discovered that there's something about an ordinary lead pencil from Earth that makes it a great delicacy here. We grind up a pencil, lead and all, except for the little brass part and the rubber eraser. Some of the termites like it without any rubber. Others like it with the rubber sliced or ground up and sprinkled on, like onion in a hamburger. We serve a pencilburger between two small slabs of ordinary local wood instead of a bun.

They don't give a damn about Terran money if they can get pencilburgers instead.

Now, I was very thorough in my requisitions and specified the exact kind of pencils I needed and all, but some jackass went ahead and shipped some new kind that seems to be made out of sawdust instead of good aromatic cedar. I was out in the hills supervising some lumbering when they came in, and no one found out what was happening until over a hundred thousand pencilburgers had been doled out to the termites.

I tell you, E. J., I wouldn't believe it if I hadn't seen it. There was something about those pencils that made the termites absolutely ribald. The word is too mild. Think of the worst drunk you've ever been on, or seen, and multiply it by ten and imagine it went on for seven or eight days.

The first day wasn't so bad. They did carve all sorts of pornographic pictures and mottos on all the wooden buildings, and put a lot of equipment out of commission. The second day they got into the files and ate up all the records. Ordinarily they don't care much for paper, but they were too drunk to care. The third day they attacked personnel. They weren't vicious; just playful. One of their favorite tricks was to eat their way quietly up through the seat of a wooden chair someone was sitting on, and —

But all that we could have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stood. On the fourth day we discovered that they'd gotten into the insides of the bottles.

I don't know what the hell they did, but I can describe the results. If you take good whiskey and put it in one of those bottles, the following changes occur within one day:

1. The alcohol content drops to nil.

2. The color changes to sickening green.

3. The taste becomes awful. I can only describe it as tasting like vinegar in which spoiled salt herring have been soaked.

There were other things that happened, but I haven't time to describe them. Everything considered, we're all happy to come through it alive.

I personally am in hiding from the Termite government, with a price on my head. I am also avoiding my former human employees, who seem to blame me for the whole thing. One bunch even went around looking for a rope, but fortunately the drunken termites had chewed them all up.

I'm starting for the hills as soon as I mail this report. I'm taking two loaves of bread I managed to steal from the commissary, and ten of the original sample bottles that are still filled with the good whiskey. I also have in my knapsack a few thousand of the old cedar pencils, with which I hope, after things have cooled down a little, to propitiate the Termite authorities or a least bribe my way to the spaceport. I thought I might head out to the Lesser Magellanic Cloud, or somewhere.

You can apply my last month's salary against the whiskey.

Good-by and good luck,
Otto Stehdenbed.

Date: June 15, 2017.
From: President.
To: Vice Presidents, Regional Managers.
Subject: Intercompany communications.

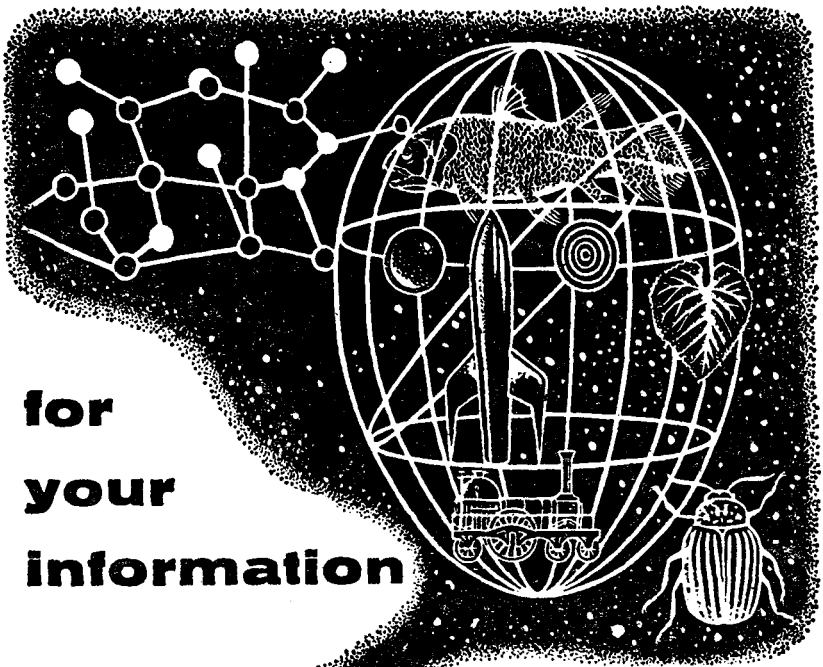
Sometimes the stupidity of some of our employees approaches downright treason. I refer to the disastrous and completely unforgivable breakdown in interdepartmental co-ordination in the recent matter of handling requisitions for our former plant on Arcturus V.

How can we advance, or even stay in business, if our right hands do not know what our left hands are doing?

Of course we don't want to jeopardize the secrecy of any valuable proprietary Company formulas or processes, nor do we want plans, costs, remunerations, etc., bandied about carelessly. But I want each of you to . . .

—C. C. MacAPP

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



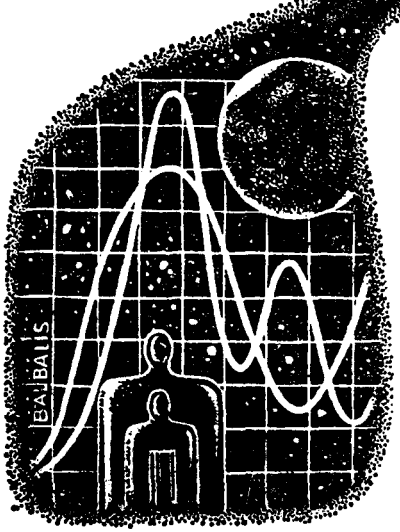
for your information

BY WILLY LEY

FORERUNNERS OF THE PLANETARIUM

"The forerunner of the planetarium of today is the orrery, and the forerunner of the orrery . . ."

When I said this sentence aloud at home, both my daughters interrupted me in unison — a unison that would normally need half a dozen rehearsals to make it as perfect as it was. But



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they did not say the same thing. One of them said: "The what?" while the other, not trusting my pronunciation, said: "Spell it." I did spell it. But that did not clarify the situation at all; they swore they had never heard the word.

I pointed out that both of them had repeatedly seen a very fine orrery. The answer again came in unison: "Where?"

I'll explain what an orrery is in a moment, but it seems to me that the word should be explained first. If somebody had asked me, say about a year ago, about the derivation of the word I probably would have guessed that it was somehow derived from the Latin *hora*, meaning "*hour*" — assuming that somebody in England, a century or two ago, had dropped the initial "h" somewhere along the way.

My guess would have been ingenious and totally wrong. It so happens that the word orrery is not a corruption of a Latin term; it is a name. The device is named after Charles Boyle, Fourth Earl of Orrery. And the earl was not even the inventor; he merely had a very fine one in his castle circa 1725.

After getting the word out of the way I can proceed to the explanation of what an orrery really is.

It is a model of the solar system and there is a very fine one at the Hayden Planetarium in New York City, where it is called the Copernican Room. The planets, represented by spheres of the proper size, hang from the ceiling and move in circular tracks, accompanied by their moons which move around them. Of course the motion has been speeded up, or else one would not be able to see it. A similar large orrery is at the Morehead Planetarium, Chapel Hill, N.C., while a third one can be found in the German Museum in Munich.

In all three cases a modern planetarium is housed in the same building, so that visitors can see easily how they differ in function. The orrery shows how the planets move in their orbits and the mechanism could, if desired, be stopped at the moment where the positions of the model planets agree with the positions of the actual planets on that day. That is how the solar system would appear at that moment, as seen from the outside. The modern planetarium, on the other hand, produces the view from the earth. In fact, the starry sky of the planetarium is superior to the actual night sky in several respects. In the first place, it does not matter what the weather is doing outside the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dome. In the second place, the motions can be speeded up so that you can actually follow the motions of Mars among the fixed stars. Finally, you are not restricted geographically to the place where you happen to be.

Nor are you limited to the time in which you happen to live. The planetarium can reproduce the sky as it looked from Ur of the Chaldees in 1950 B.C. when Alpha Draconis was the pole star; or it can reproduce the sky as seen from Manhattan Island in about 12,000 A.D. when Vega will be the North Star and the Southern Cross will be above the horizon over New York Bay.

While the orreries in Munich, New York and Chapel Hill — listing them in chronological order of their completion — are large and expensive and therefore rare devices, smaller orreries exist in many places. The smallest and simplest device which could still be called an orrery is one that consists of an electric light bulb with a reflector in the middle, a small globe of the earth and a small sphere representing the moon. When you turn a crank the moon will start spinning around the earth and the earth will start turning and describe its orbit around the sun. It is a teaching device for demonstrating the phases of the moon and for showing why the moon is not eclipsed by the earth's shadow each time it goes around the earth.

There can be no doubt that a large number of orreries which once existed have never been described in print. Those we know about all date from 1700 or later and are, therefore, models of the solar system after Copernicus and Kepler had been generally accepted. Whether, say prior to 1500, anybody ever tried to build an orrery according to Ptolemy, with the earth in the center, is not known. It probably was not done because at the time the armillary sphere (we'll get to that soon) was considered sufficient for the purpose of explaining the construction of the universe.

But we cannot be certain because the written word is incomplete in a very peculiar way. Writers, especially at a time when there were very few of them, wrote selectively. They either wrote down what happened to have made an impression, or else they wrote what they thought the future might wish to know. The result of this attitude is that we have very little knowledge of those things which these writers took for granted. If we now know what kinds of knives and forks were used at a baronial banquet in, say, 1600, we are likely to know this because of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

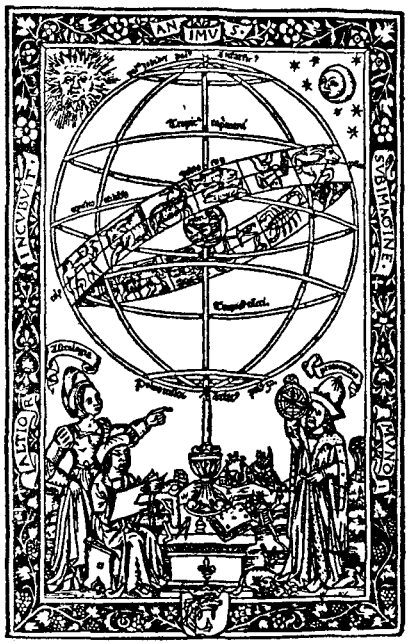


Fig. 1 Tycho Brahe's great armilla, mounted in his second observatory of Stjerneborg on the island of Hveen. (From his own work on his instruments.)

actual knives and forks that have somehow come down to our time, not from contemporary descriptions. Let me add one more example. We would know from contemporary chronicles, bills of sale and similar things that the gold coin of the reign of Henry VII, minted around 1495, was called an "angel". But it would be a major literary research project (and one that is likely to fail) to find out how an "angel" looked. Of course nobody needs to undertake this research project since we have the actual coin; it isn't even a great rarity.

The fact that a pre-Copernician orrery is not mentioned anywhere is therefore no proof that none ever existed. It merely proves that it, if it existed, did not become famous enough to be described. But let us assume that none was built. And that brings us to the question of what preceded the orrery.

Here you get two opinions, depending on point of view. Those who consider an orrery mainly a complicated mechanical device are likely to name the astronomical clocks, which were the pride of many a European city between 1400 and 1600. Astronomers, however, will be inclined to name the armillary sphere as the forerunner, since it was an attempt at representing the universe.

And the armillary sphere, or armilla — both terms are used almost interchangeably, though a more complicated example is usually called an armillary sphere — in turn goes back to the celestial globes of antiquity.

Celestial globes were just what their name means, globes on which the positions of the major stars and constellations were engraved on the outside. An especially fine example is a celestial globe with a diameter of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not quite 26 inches, supported by a statue of Atlas. The sculpture, of Greek origin, dates back to about 300 B.C. and is now in the National Museum at Naples. A number of other celestial globes, usually made of bronze or silver, has been mentioned by Muslim writers, especially if they were made for the ruling Caliph, but the oldest still extant example is one made in 1080 A.D. But as a device for teaching the solid sphere had a drawback. It showed the stars on the outside of a globe. The pupil had to imagine, if he could, that he saw the stars from the inside.

The armillary sphere was a skeleton sphere; you could look through it. There is a mural dating back to about 50 B.C. on the wall of a villa at Boscoreale, not far from Pompeii, which shows a sphere consisting only of the imaginary circles, like equator, arctic and antarctic circles, and the ecliptic. It is not known, of course, whether this mural was just a painting or whether it can be taken as an illustration of this kind which actually existed then. If it does depict something then in actual existence, the model for the painting would be a very early armillary sphere. If it is a painting showing a principle, then it was the forerunner of actual spheres to be built.

The early pictures of armillary spheres which definitely are illustrations depicting existing spheres can be found in manuscripts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. They show the equator, the tropics the polar circles, the ecliptic and usually a number of meridians. After that, as we know from actual examples that have been preserved, the craftsmen took over and lavished their skill on the job of building a "good" sphere. The ecliptic was no longer a wire ring in the proper position. It became a band of chased copper with the signs of the zodiac engraved upon it. There were movable pointers for the more important stars. In some the planets were added and could be moved along wire loops by hand. But Venus was not just a ball of ivory, or Mars a ball of copper — they were symbolical figures representing Venus and Mars. It is no exaggeration to say that some of these spheres were smothered in elaboration.

I have often been asked by people who looked at one of these elaborate armillary spheres (or just photographs of them) how they were used for astronomical observations. The answer is that they weren't. They were teaching devices for classroom use. The teacher might, for example, move the figure repre-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

senting the sun into the constellation Virgo. He would then explain that, with this position of the sun, the sign of Virgo and the neighboring constellations would be in the daylight sky and hence invisible, but that the constellations of the zodiac opposite the position of the sun — "look through the sphere and you'll see them" — would be in the night sky.

I know of a modern astronomer who uses an armillary sphere for the purpose of teaching his students how astronomy was taught in the past. It not only does this particular job, it also proves that the armillary sphere itself was a rather good teaching device for memorizing and understanding the apparent motions of the celestial bodies.

Of course the armillary sphere was built with the assumption that the earth was in the center of the universe. The more elaborate specimens do have a globe of the earth in the center. This enhances the sphere as a model of what the world was believed to be, but the central globe interfered with the teaching so that the spheres actually used had an empty center so that you could look through the sphere.

While the armillary sphere was meant for students, the astronomical clocks were meant for the public. A typical arrangement (much simplified) is shown in Fig. 3. The upper clock was simply a clock, while the lower face showed the zodiac. There two arrangements were possible and both were used. Either you had the zodiac immobile, just painted on the background in gold, silver, green, blue, red and a few other colors and you had a golden disk representing the sun at the end of a pointer, moving it over the signs of the zodiac once a year. Or else (as assumed for Fig. 3) you had the golden disk of the sun immobile and the zodiac painted on a slowly moving circle. Separate dials gave the month and the date, while a slowly turning sphere which was half silver and half black showed the phases of the moon.

A look at such a clock therefore provided the date, the time of day, the prevailing lunar phase and the position of the sun along the zodiac.

But this was only the actual information supplied by such a clock. There was still room for elaboration. The astronomical clock built in Strassbourg in 1352 was an example. We know that the master who built this cathedral clock spent two full years on this work. (Legend says that his name was Jehan Boerhave and that he was the pupil of Arab

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

craftsmen, but in fact, the name of the master is unknown.) A quick description will show why A rooster, perched on top, crowed every hour. Then a statue of the Virgin Mary appeared and the three Wise Men passed in front of her, bowing. The crowing of the rooster was followed by a hymn on a carillon. And there was a somewhat stylized human figure with a pointer moving over it, indicating that part of the body which was astrologically favored for bleeding. if bleeding was deemed necessary.

Yes, it was possible to be more elaborate than that, as was proved in 1530 by Kaspar Brunner, when the City of Bern requested him to build an astronomical clock for a tower especially built for the purpose. The clock part consisted of the customary two dials, one giving the hours and minutes, the other the astronomical information for astrological purposes. Since Bern was in a republic, and since the clock was not a church clock but a city clock, Brunner could not use kings and princes as had been done elsewhere, nor could he use a religious theme for elaboration Hence the famous clock of Bern marked the hours as follows:

Five minutes before the hour a rooster crowed and the figure of a fool sitting above him hit

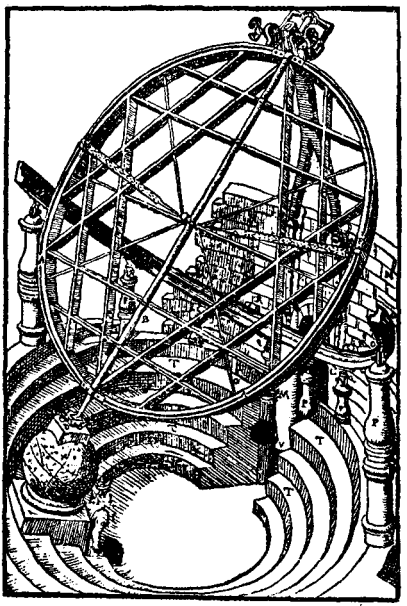


Fig. 2 Picture of an armilla with zodiac from a book by the Austrian astronomer Georg von Peuerbach (died 1461) printed in 1515. The lady to the left is labelled "Astrology" the man to the right is Ptolemy.

two different bells. After that a royal figure, representing the sun, turned its hand holding an hourglass and a bear (the coat of arms of the city features a bear) who sat opposite the rooster shook his head. Thereupon, on a lower gallery, a whole troop of bears pranced across, some walking, some on horseback. After they were gone, the rooster crowed again, then a very tall figure of a man, dressed all in black, appeared, raised a hand holding a hammer and struck a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

square bell. The new hour had started . . .

Let's get back to representations of the sky.

The earliest known example is a tent made by an unknown Arab craftsman. It was conquered during the Fifth Crusade; when Emperor Friedrich II of Hohenstaufen returned to Italy in 1229 he brought it with him. It is described as having had a cupola-shaped roof showing the constellations. A hidden clockwork made the stars move, as the not very detailed description says; in all probability it turned the whole cupola so that a man sitting inside the tent could watch the motion of the stars across the night sky in accelerated time.

Unfortunately this earliest forerunner of the planetarium is lost without a trace. No good description is known. No drawing, if one was made, is still in existence.

The next attempt to represent the appearance of the starry sky is much better documented. It is known as Gottorp's Globus, named after Duke Friedrich von Holstein-Gottorp, who had it built for him. Scientific advisor was the mathematician and astronomer, Adam Olearius; the man who did the actual building was Andreas Busch. The work took from 1656 to 1664.

It was a sphere of sheet copper, with a diameter of 11½ feet. On the outside it was painted to show the continents and oceans of the earth. But all the more important stars were represented by holes drilled through the copper so that Duke Friedrich, when he entered his globe during daylight hours, had a representation of the night sky. Since the ducal family had a Russian branch, the famous globe was taken to St. Petersburg in 1713; I have not been able to find out what has happened to it since.

The Gottorp globe found a successor in London in 1851 when James Wyld, M. P., had a sixty-foot globe built in the center of Leicester Square. Mr. Wyld's original idea had been to show the extent of the British Empire to Londoners and visitors by means of a very large globe. But he then realized that a person standing near a very large globe can see only a small portion of that globe and he found a solution in an inverted globe.

The continents and oceans and rivers and so forth were put on the inside of his sixty-foot sphere in bas relief. That way a visitor could look at a much larger area at a glance and, if the reporter of the *Illustrated London News* of the time can be trusted, the globe was large enough so that a visitor would not realize that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he looked at a concave surface. But James Wyld's inverted globe — called the "georama" in some references — had nothing to do with astronomy or a representation of the sky.

It seems a long way from Gottorp's globe to the modern planetarium, but the long way was traversed in a single step, without any intermediary developments. The way this came about was as follows: In 1903, Dr. Oskar von Miller, the son of Ferdinand von Miller, who was the director of the Royal Foundry in Munich, outlined his ideas for a museum which was to be devoted to accomplishments in science and technology. The museum conceived by Dr. von Miller now exists; it is the German Museum in Munich.

Part of the museum was to be devoted to astronomy, which meant a "planetarium". When von Miller used this word he meant a large orrery. But in addition to a large orrery von Miller also wanted something that represented the sky as seen in a clear night. Knowing about Gottorp's globe, he had something like the movable cupola of an astronomical observatory in mind, with holes for the stars so that the night sky could be seen during the day by way of daylight shining through the holes. If operation during the night should be scheduled, floodlights could do the job.

While Dr. von Miller had a general idea of how it could be done, he knew very well that he would need specialists for the details. He sent a request to the firm of Carl Zeiss in Jena, which did not only build optical instruments, but observatory cupolas as well. At the Zeiss office they started to think. Wouldn't it be better to use light bulbs of different strengths for the stars? That would make the operation of the new planetarium completely independent of the weather. But what about the planets?

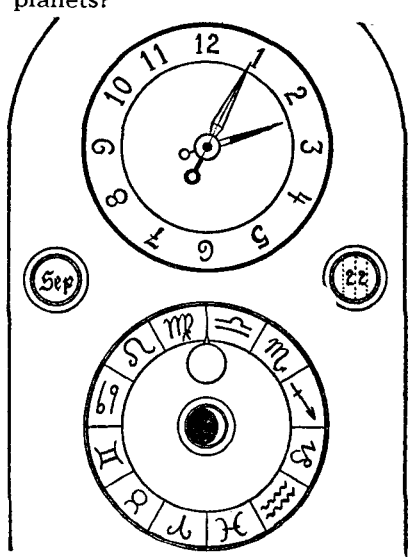


Fig. 3. Typical arrangement of the dials on an astronomical clock of the sixteenth century. (For detail see text.)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dr. von Miller had not prescribed any figures but he wanted his planetarium large enough to accomodate up to a hundred visitors at a time. This meant that the planets would have to be illuminated balls at the ends of pointers that would have to be as much as twenty or more feet in length. The designing engineers groaned at the thought. But the task was, after all, only difficult. Nobody had asked for anything impossible and they had all the leeway they wanted when it came to detail. So they went to work.

Before anything could be shown the first World War began and everything was delayed for four years. But there had been enough preliminary work so that a first model was ready some eight months or so after the end of that war. Then it turned out that the first idea of how to do it had quite a number of drawbacks.

The "planets" could not be made visible by means of spotlights without illuminating part of the dome. And the big cupola which carried all the light bulbs representing the stars could not be turned, except so noisily that the lecturer's voice would be drowned out.

After this experience the director of the Zeiss works, Dr. Walter Bauersfeld, came to the conclusion that the planets should be projected against the dome. But if you project the planets, why not the fixed stars as well? Therefore he proposed that the dome should not rotate but be solid and motionless, serving only as the projection surface for the images originating from a series of small projectors located in the center of the sphere, that is to say in the center of the floor of the seating area.

The suggestion was accepted, but it took five years until all the minor difficulties could be overcome.

The first planetarium — as we now understand the term — was opened in Munich in the late summer of 1924. The Zeiss projector did not yet have the now familiar shape resembling a monstrous dumbbell. There was one projector for the fixed stars and an inclined cylinder for everything else. But it worked, and the firm of Carl Zeiss quickly received requests from other cities. The second Zeiss planetarium was built in Dusseldorf, the next one in Nuremberg and, after some delay, one in Berlin. In the meantime American museums and scientific institutions had negotiated with Zeiss too, and the first planetarium in the United States was the Adler Planetarium in Chicago. It open-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ed its doors on May 10, 1930. The Fels Planetarium in Philadelphia was the second (November 1, 1933), the Griffith Observatory and Planetarium in Los Angeles the third (May 14, 1935). New York's Hayden Planetarium followed hard on the heels of the Griffith Planetarium; it was opened on October 2, 1935. The Buhl Planetarium in Pittsburgh was the fifth (October 24, 1939) and the Morehead Planetarium of the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, N. C., rounded out the first half dozen when it was opened on May 10, 1949.

How many are in operation in the United States now?

According to a letter which Armand N. Spitz wrote to me on July 23, 1964, the number is "between 300 and 400" — and I might add that Armand N. Spitz is mainly responsible for this large number.

The fully developed Zeiss projector was a modern miracle, but modern miracles tend to be expensive. The Zeiss projector was no exception. Spitz wanted a projector that would do what the Zeiss instrument could do, or at least come close, but that would be within financial reach of High Schools, smaller museums and libraries in smaller communities.

In 1947 he succeeded in building a small and relatively inexpensive functioning projector.

The projector for the fixed stars consisted of a dodecahedron made of black plastic sheets. Inside the dodecahedron was a light bulb. The stars were holes of different sizes drilled into the black plastic through which the light of the bulb shone. To produce the diurnal motion of the stars the machine was rotated around an axis parallel to the axis of the earth. Changes in latitude were produced by tilting this axis. The planets and the sun and moon were handled by separate projectors. One of the first Spitz projectors was installed at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, N.Y. Within ten years of its creation, nearly 200 of the small projectors were installed all over the United States.

But while this was going on, the Spitz projector grew, too. Model B, as it was called, was a much bigger projector, resembling in external shape the later model of the Zeiss projector. But while the Zeiss projector has a solid mounting, the Model B projector was suspended from cables, so that it seemed to float in air during a demonstration. The first of the Model B projectors was installed at the *Centro Municipal de Divulgacion*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cientifica in Montevideo, Uruguay. The second went to Flint College in Flint, Mich., and the third to the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

The advent of the space age added a new request. Up to 1957 everybody had been quite happy to overcome time and geographical location on the ground by means of a planetarium projector. But then the question came up how things would look when seen from space.

The first projection device which is not earthbound, though it rests on a solid mounting like the Zeiss instruments, is the one at Abrams Planetarium of Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan. It has the somewhat cumbersome name of Intermediate Space Transit Planetarium or ISTP. The Spitz ISTP can go into a satellite orbit around the earth, fly from the earth to the moon, make a loop around the moon and take up a parking orbit around the moon — or, at least it will look that way to the audience.

The next type — still under development — is the Space Transit Simulator or STS, which will be able to do what the ISTP does, but in addition to that it will be capable of flying to Mars and to Venus.

Astronauts getting ready for missions to Mars and to Venus will be able to use it for training. And the day is not too far off when an astronaut, after having returned from an interplanetary mission and being tired of answering questions of what things look like in space, will take his questioners by the hand, lead them to the nearest institution which owns an STS and say:

"Sit still now and see for yourself."

—WILLY LEY

BACK NUMBERS

If you've missed any copies of *Galaxy*, *IF* or *Worlds of Tomorrow* from 1960 to date, our Back Number Department has a limited supply available at 50c each, any three issues for $1.00, regardless of original cover price. Copies sent postpaid anywhere in U.S. or Canada. Sorry, no copies before 1960 at present available. Send dates and title of issues you wish with remittance to Galaxy Publishing Corp., 421 Hudson Street, New York City 1001

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE SIXTH PALACE

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

It was the richest treasure in the galaxy, and anyone could win it. All you had to do was die!

Ben Azai was deemed worthy and stood at the gate of the sixth palace and saw the ethereal splendor of the pure marble plates. He opened his mouth and said twice, "Water! Water!" In the twinkling of an eye they decapitated him and threw eleven thousand iron bars at him. This shall be a sign for all generations that no one shall err at the gate of the sixth palace. — Lesser Hekhaloth

There was the treasure, and there was the guardian of the treasure. And there were the whitening bones of those who had tried in vain to make the treasure their own. Even the bones had taken on a kind of beauty, lying out there by the gate of the treasure vault, under the blazing arch of the heavens. The treasure itself lent beauty to everything near it — even the scattered bones, even the grim guardian.

The home of the treasure was a small world that belonged to red Valzar. Hardly more than moon-sized, really, with no atmosphere to speak of, a silent, dead little world that spun through darkness a billion miles from its cooling primary. A wayfarer had stopped there once. Where from, where bound? No one knew. He had established a cache there, and there it still lay, changeless and eternal, treasure beyond belief, presided over by the faceless metal man who waited with metal patience for his master's return.

There were those who would have the treasure. They came, and were challenged by the guardian, and died.

On another world of the Valzar system, men undiscouraged by the fate of their predecessors dreamed of the hoard, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

schemed to possess it. Lipescu was one: a tower of a man, golden beard, fists like hammers, gullet of brass, back as broad as a tree of a thousand years. Bolzano was another: awl-shaped, bright of eye, fast of finger, twig-thick, razor-sharp.

They had no wish to die.

Lipescu's voice was like the rumble of island galaxies in collision. He wrapped himself around a tankard of good black ale and said, "I go tomorrow, Bolzano."

"Is the computer ready?"

"Programmed with everything the beast could ask me," the big man boomed. "There won't be a slip."

"And if there is?" Bolzano asked, peering idly into the blue, oddly pale, strangely meek eyes of the giant. "And if the robot kills you?"

"I've dealt with robots before."

Bolzano laughed. "That plain is littered with bones, friend. Yours will join the rest. Great bulky bones, Lipescu. I can see them now."

"You're a cheerful one, friend."

Lipescu shook his head heavily. "If you were realistic, you wouldn't be in this with me," he said slowly. "Only a dreamer would do such a thing as this." One meaty paw hovered in the air, caught Bolzano's forearm. The little man winced as bones ground together. Lipescu said, "You won't back out? If I die, you'll make the attempt?"

"Of course I will, you idiot."

"Will you? You're a coward, like all little men. You'll watch me die, and then you'll turn tail and head for another part of the universe as fast as you know how — won't you?"

"I intend to profit by your mistakes," Bolzano said in a clear, testy voice. "Let go of my arm."

Lipescu released his grip. The little man sank back in his chair, rubbing his arm. He gulped ale. He grinned at his partner and raised his glass.

"To success," Bolanzo said.

"Yes. To the treasure."

"And to long life afterwards."

"For both of us," the big man boomed.

"Perhaps," said Bolzano. "Perhaps."

He had his doubts. The big man was sly, Ferd Bolzano knew. His was a good combination, not often found; strength and cunning. Yet the risks were great. Bolzano wondered what he preferred — if Lipescu should gain the treasure on his attempt, he was assured of a share without risk, or if Lipescu should die, he would be forced to venture

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his own life. Which was better, a third of the treasure without hazard, or the whole thing for the highest stake?

Bolzano was a good enough gambler to that. Yet there was more than cowardice to the man; in his own way, he longed for the chance to risk his life on the airless treasure world.

Lipescu would go first. That was the agreement. Bolzano had stolen the computer, had turned it over to the big man, who would make the initial attempt. If he gained the prize, his was the greater share. If he perished, all was Bolzano's. An odd partnership, odd terms, but Lipescu would have it no other way, and Ferd Bolzano did not argue the point with his beefy compatriot. Lipescu would return with the treasure, or he would not return at all. There would be no middle way. Of this, both were certain.

Bolzano spent an uneasy night. His apartment, in an airy shaft of a building overlooking glittering Lake Eris, was a comfortable place, and he had little longing to leave it. Lipescu, by preference, lived in the stinking slums beyond the southern shore of the lake, and when the two men parted at midnight, they went in opposite ways. Bolzano considered bringing a woman home for the night — but did not. Instead, he sat moody and wakeful before the televector screen, peering at the green and gold and ochre planets as they sailed through the emptiness.

Toward dawn, he ran the tape of the treasure. Octave Merlin had made that tape, a hundred years before, as he orbited sixty miles above the surface of the airless little world. Now Merlin's bones bleached on the plain, but the tape had come home, and bootlegged copies commanded a high price in hidden markets. His camera's sharp eye had seen much.

There was the gate — there was the guardian. Gleaming, ageless, splendid. The robot stood ten feet high, a square, black shape topped by the tiny anthropomorphic head-dome, featureless and sleek. Behind him the gate, wide open but impassable. And then the treasure, culled from the craftsmanship of a thousand worlds. Left here untold years ago.

No mere jewels, No dreary slabs of so-called precious metal. The wealth here was not intrinsic; no vandal would think of melting the treasure into dead ingots. Here were statuettes of spun iron, that seemed to move and breathe. Plaques of purest lead, engraved with lathework that dazzled the mind and made the heart hesitate. Cunning in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

taglios in granite, from the workshops of a frosty world half a parsec from nowhere. A scatter of opals, burning with an inner light, fashioned into artful loops of brightness.

A helix of rainbow-colored wood. A series of interlocking strips of some beast's bone, bent and splayed so that the pattern blurred and perhaps abutted some other dimensional continuum. Cleverly carved shells, one within the other, descending to infinity. Burnished leaves of nameless trees. Polished pebbles from unknown beaches. A dizzying spew of wonders, covering some fifty square yards, sprawled out behind the gate in stunning profusion.

Rough men unschooled in the tenets of esthetics had given their lives to possess the treasure. It took no fancy knowledge to realize the wealth of it. Collectors, strung from galaxy to galaxy, would fight with bared fangs to claim their share. Gold bars did not a treasure make. But these things? Beyond duplication, almost beyond price?

Bolzano was wet with a fever of yearning before the tape had run its course. When it was over, he slumped in his chair, drained, depleted.

Dawn came. The silvery moons fell from the sky. The red sun splashed across the heavens. Bolzano allowed himself the luxury of an hour's sleep.

And then it was time to begin.

As a precautionary measure, they left the ship in a parking orbit three miles above the airless world. Past reports were unreliable, and there was no telling how far the robot guardian's power extended. If Lipescu was successful, Bolzano would descend for him — and the treasure. If Lipescu failed, Bolzano would land and make his own attempt.

The big man looked even bigger, encased in his suit and in the outer casement of a dropshaft. Against his massive chest he wore the computer, an extra brain as lovingly crafted as any object in the treasure-hoard. The guardian would ask him questions; the computer would help him answer. And Bolzano would listen. If Lipescu erred, possibly his partner could benefit by knowledge of the error and succeed.

"Can you hear me?" Lipescu asked.

"Perfectly. Go on, get going!"

"What's the hurry? Eager to see me die?"

"Are you that lacking in confidence?" Bolzano asked. "Do you want me to go first?"

"Fool," Lipescu muttered. "Listen carefully. If I die, I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

don't want it to be in vain."

"What would it matter to you?"

The bulky figure wheeled round. Bolzano could not see his partner's face, but he knew Lipescu must be scowling. The giant rumbled, "Is life that valuable? Can't I take a risk?"

"For *my* benefit?"

"For mine," Lipescu said. "I'll be coming back."

Lipescu walked to the lock. A moment later, he was through, and gliding downward, a one-man spaceship, jets flaring beneath his feet. Bolzano settled by the scanner to watch. A televector pickup homed in on Lipescu just as he made his landing, coming down in a blaze of fire. The treasure and its guardian lay a mile away. Lipescu rid himself of the dropshaft, stepping from it like some newborn insect quitting a cocoon. He strode with giant bounds toward the waiting guardian.

Bolzano watched.

Bolzano listened.

The televector pickup provided full fidelity. It was useful for Bolanzo's purposes, and useful, too, for Lipescu's vanity — for the big man wanted his every moment taped for posterity. It was interesting to see Lipescu dwarfed by the guardian. The black faceless robot, squat and motionless, topped the big man by better than three feet.

Lipescu said, "Step aside."

The robot's reply came in surprisingly human tones, though void of any distinguishing accent. "What I guard is not to be plundered."

"I claim it by right," Lipescu said.

"So have many others. But their right did not exist. Nor does yours. I cannot step aside for you."

"Test me," Lipescu said. "See if I have the right or not!"

"Only my master may pass."

"Who is your master? *I* am your master!"

"My master is he who can command me. And no one can command me who shows ignorance before me."

"Test me, then," Lipescu demanded.

"Death is the penalty for failure."

"Test me."

"The treasure does not belong to you."

"Test me and step aside."

"Your bones will join the rest here."

"Test me," Lipescu said.

Watching from aloft, Bolzano was tense. His thin body drew together like that of a chilled spider. Anything might happen now. The robot might propound riddles, like the Sphinx con-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fronting Oedipus. It might demand the proofs of mathematical theorems. It might ask the translation of strange words. So they gathered, from their knowledge of what had befallen other men here. And, so it seemed, to give a wrong answer was to earn instant death.

He and Lipescu had ransacked the libraries of the world. They had packed all knowledge, so they hoped, into their computer. It had taken months, even with multistage programming. The tiny shining globe of metal on Lipescu's chest contained an infinity of answers to an infinity of questions.

Below, there was long silence as man and robot studied one another. Then the guardian said, "Define latitude."

"Do you mean geographical latitude?" Lipescu asked.

Bolzano congealed with fear. The idiot, asking for a clarification! He would die before he began!

The robot said, "Define latitude."

Lipescu's voice was calm. "The angular distance of a point on a planet's surface north or south of the equator, as measured from the center of the planet."

"Which is more consonant," the robot asked. "The minor third or the major sixth?"

There was a pause, Lipescu was no musician. But the computer would feed him the answer.

"The minor third," Lipescu said.

Without a pause, the robot fired another question. "Name the prime numbers between 5,237 and 7,641."

Bolzano smiled as Lipescu handled the question with ease. So far, so good. The robot had asked strictly factual questions, schoolbook stuff, posing no real problems to Lipescu. After the initial hesitation and quibble over latitude, Lipescu had seemed to grow in confidence from moment to moment. Bolzano squinted at the scanner, looking beyond the robot, through the open gate, to the helter-skelter pile of treasures. He wondered which would fall to his lot when he and Lipescu divided them, two-thirds for Lipescu, the rest for him.

"Name the seven tragic poets of Elifora," the robot said.

"Domiphar, Halionis, Slegg, Hork-Sekan —"

"The fourteen signs of the zodiac as seen from Morneez," the robot demanded.

"The Teeth, the Serpents, the Leaves, the Waterfall, the Blot —"

"What is a pedicel?"

"The stalk of an individual

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

flower of an inflorenscence," Lipescu answered.

"How many years did the Siege of Larrinax last?"

"Eight."

"What did the flower cry in the third canto of Somnor's *Vehicles?*"

"'I ache, I sob, I whimper, I die,'" Lipescu boomed.

"Distinguish between the stamen and the pistil."

"The stamen is the pollen-producing organ of the flower; the pistil—"

And so it went. Question after question. The robot was not content with the legendary three questions of mythology; it asked a dozen, and then asked more. Lipescu answered perfectly, prompted by the murmuring of the peerless compendium of knowledge strapped to his chest. Bolzano kept careful count: the big man had dealt magnificently with seventeen questions. When would the robot concede defeat? When would it end its grim quiz and step aside?

It asked an eighteenth question, pathetically easy. All it wanted was an exposition of the Pythagorean Theorem. Lipescu did not even need the computer for that. He answered, briefly, concisely, correctly. Bolzano was proud of his burly partner.

Then the robot struck Lipescu dead.

It happened in the flickering of an eyelid. Lipescu's voice had ceased, and he stood there, ready for the next question. But the next question did not come. Rather, a panel in the robot's vaulted belly slid open, and something bright and sinuous lashed out, uncoiling over the ten feet or so that separated guardian from challenger, and sliced Lipescu in half. The bright something slid back out of sight.

Lipescu's trunk toppled to one side. His massive legs remained absurdly planted for a moment; then they crumpled, a space-suited leg kicked once, and all was still.

Stunned, Bolzano trembled in the loneliness of the cabin, and his lymph turned to water. What had gone wrong? Lipescu had given the proper answer to every question, and yet the robot had slain him. Why? Could the big man possibly have misphrased Pythagoras? No—Bolzano had listened. The answer had been flawless, as had the seventeen that preceded it. Seemingly the robot had lost patience with the game, then. The robot had cheated. Arbitrarily, maliciously, it had lashed out at Lipescu, punishing him for the correct answer.

Did the robot cheat, Bolzano wondered? Could they act in malicious spite? No robot he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

knew was capable of such actions. But this robot was unlike all others.

For a long while, Bolzano remained huddled in the cabin. The temptation to blast free of orbit and head home was strong. Yet the treasure called to him. Some suicidal impulse drove him on. Siren-like, the robot drew him downward.

There had to be a way to make the robot yield, Bolzano thought, as he guided his small ship down to the broad barren plain. Using the computer had been a good idea, but it hadn't helped Lipescu pass the robot. The records were uncertain, but it appeared that in the past, men had died when they finally gave a wrong answer after a series of right ones. Lipescu had given no wrong answers. Yet he too had died. It was inconceivable that the robot understood some relationship of the squares on the hypotenuse and on the other two sides that was different from the relationship Lipescu had expressed.

Bolzano wondered what method would work.

He plodded leadenly across the plain toward the gate and its guardian. The germ of an idea formed in him, as he walked doggedly on.

He was, he knew, condemned to death by his own greed. Only extreme agility of mind could save him from sharing Lipescu's fate. Ordinary intelligence would not work. Odyssean cleverness was the only salvation.

Bolzano approached the robot. Bones lay everywhere. Lipescu weltered in his own blood. Against that vast dead chest lay the computer, Bolzano knew. But he shrank from reaching for it. He would do without it. He looked away, unwilling to let the sight of Lipescu's severed body interfere with the coolness of his thoughts.

He collected his courage. The robot showed no interest in him.

"Give ground," Bolzano said. "I am here. I come for the treasure."

"Win your right to it."

"What must I do?"

"Demonstrate truth," the robot said. "Reveal inwardness. Display understanding."

"I am ready," said Bolzano.

The robot offered a question. "What is the excretory unit of the vertebrate kidney called?"

Bolzano contemplated. He had no idea. The computer could tell him, but the computer lay strapped to fallen Lipescu. No matter. The robot wanted truth, inwardness, understanding. Those things were not necessarily the same as information. Lipescu had offered information.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But Lipescu had perished.

"The frog in the pond," Bolzano said, "utters an azure cry."

There was silence. Bolzano watched the robot's front, waiting for the panel to slide open and the sinuous something chop him in half.

The robot said, "During the War of Dogs on Vanderveer IX, the embattled colonists drew up thirty-eight dogmas of defiance. Quote the third, the ninth, the twenty-second, and the thirty-fifth."

Bolzano pondered. This was an alien robot, product of an unknown hand. How did its maker's mind work? Did it respect knowledge? Did it treasure facts for their own sake? Or did it recognize that information is meaningless, insight a non-logical process?

Lipescu had been logical. He lay in pieces.

"The mereness of pain," Bolzano responded, "is ineffable and refreshing."

The robot said, "The monastery of Kwaisen was besieged by the soldiers of Oda Nobunaga on the third of April, 1582. What words of wisdom did the abbot utter?"

Bolzano spoke quickly and buoyantly. "Eleven, forty-one, elephant, voluminous."

The last word slipped from his lips despite an effort to retrieve it. Elephants *were* voluminous, he thought. A fatal slip? The robot did not appear to notice.

Sonorously, ponderously, the great machine delivered the next question.

"What is the percentage of oxygen in the atmosphere of Muldonar VII?"

"False witness bears a swift sword," Bolzano replied.

The robot made an odd humming noise. Abruptly it rolled on massive treads, moving some six feet to its left. The gate of the treasure-trove stood wide, beckoning.

"You may enter," the robot said.

Bolzano's heart leaped. He had won! He had gained the high prize!

Others had failed, their bones glistened on the plain. They had tried to answer the robot, sometimes giving right answers, sometimes giving wrong ones, and they had died. Bolzano lived.

It was a miracle, he thought. Luck? Shrewdness? Some of each, he told himself. He had watched a man give eighteen right answers and die. So the accuracy of the responses did not matter to the robot. What did? Inwardness. Understanding. Truth.

There could be inwardness and understanding and truth in ran-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dom answers, Bolzano realized. Where earnest striving had failed, mockery had succeeded. He had staked his life on nonsense, and the prize was his.

He staggered forward, into the treasure-trove. Even in the light gravity, his feet were like leaden weights. Tension ebbed in him. He knelt among the treasures.

The tapes, the sharp-eyed televector scanners, had not begun to indicate the splendor of what lay here. Bolzano stared in awe and rapture at a tiny disk, no greater in diameter than a man's eye, on which myriad coiling lines writhed and twisted in patterns of rare beauty. He caught his breath, sobbing with the pain of perception as a gleaming marble spire, angled in mysterious swerves, came into view. Here, a bright beetle of some fragile waxy substance rested on a pedestal of yellow jade. There, a tangle of metallic cloth spurted dizzying patterns of luminescence. And over there — and beyond — and there —

The ransom of a universe, Bolzano thought.

It would take many trips to carry all this to his ship. Perhaps it would be better to bring the ship to the hoard, eh? He wondered, though, if he would lose his advantage if he stepped back through the gate. Was it possible that he would have to win entrance all over again? And would the robot accept his answers as willingly the second time?

It was something he would have to chance, Bolzano decided. His nimble mind worked out a plan. He would select a dozen, two dozen of the finest treasures, as much as he could comfortably carry, and take them back to the ship. Then he would lift the ship and set it down next to the gate. If the robot raised objections about his entering, Bolzano would simply depart, taking what he had already secured. There was no point in running undue risks. When he had sold this cargo, and felt pinched for money, he could always return and try to win admission once again. Certainly, no one else would steal the horde if he abandoned it.

Selection, that was the key.

Crouching, Bolzano picked through the treasure, choosing for portability and easy marketability. The marble spire? Too big. But the coiling disk, yes, certainly, and the beetle, of course, and this small statuette of dull hue, and the cameos showing scenes no human eye had ever beheld, and this, and this, and this —

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His pulse raced. His heart thundered. He saw himself travelling from world to world, vending his wares. Collectors, museums, governments would vie with one another to have these prizes. He would let them bid each object up into the millions before he sold. And, of course, he would keep one or two for himself, or perhaps three or four, souvenirs of this great adventure.

And someday when wealth bored him he would return, and face the challenge again. And he would dare the robot to question him, and he would reply with random absurdities, demonstrating his grasp on the fundamental insight that in knowledge there is only hollow merit. And the robot would admit him once more to the treasure-trove.

Bolzano rose. He cradled his lovelies in his arms. Carefully, carefully, he thought. Turning, he made his way through the gate.

The robot had not moved. It had shown no interest as Bolzano plundered the hoard. The small man walked calmly past it.

The robot said, "Why have you taken those? What do you want with them?"

Bolzano smiled. Nonchalantly he replied, "I've taken them because they're beautiful. Because I want them. Is there a better reason?"

"No," the robot said, and the panel slid open in its ponderous black chest.

Too late, Bolzano realized that the test had not yet ended, that the robot's question had arisen out of no idle curiosity. And this time he had replied in earnest, speaking in rational terms.

Bolzano shrieked. He saw the brightness coming toward him.

Death followed instantly.

— ROBERT SILVERBERG

On your newsstand now —

THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION FROM WORLDS OF TOMORROW

Brian W. Aldiss	**Fritz Leiber**
T. K. Brown, III	**C. C. MacApp**
Miriam Allen deFord	**Cordwainer Smith**
Julian F. Grow	**Jack Williamson**
Keith Laumer	**Robert F. Young**

Get your copy today

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE MAN WHO KILLED IMMORTALS

BY J.T. McINTOSH

Illustrated by MORROW

They lived forever — and, of course, they feared to die!

She interrupted the suave voice coldly. "I don't even listen to threats," she said, and snapped off sound and vision. Within five seconds the buzzer was rasping its hoarse demand for attention. She didn't move, frowning at the blank screen of the visiphone. Presently the buzzer stopped.

When it sounded again five minutes later she switched on. The face that appeared was again the pale, blank face of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

extortionist. Obviously he wore a mask. Without giving him a chance to speak she switched off again.

This time the buzzer stood silent.

She was a tall, regal woman, with something icy and enigmatic about her perfection. For fully ten minutes after the second call she stood motionless in front of the screen with no change in her expression. Then at last, with obvious reluctance, she made a call.

The face that appeared this time was that of a young police sar. She did not miss the slight hardening of his expression when he saw her and realized what she was.

"Vanessa Gort here," she said. "Obviously you know I'm an elsie. Your name, please?"

"Sar Smith. You'll want to talk to the cap, of course. No elsie would waste her time with a mere sar."

"Wait. I've been threatened."

"With what?"

"Disfiguration. You know what that means."

"To you, yes."

"To any woman."

"To you more than to a woman." There was a subtle emphasis on the word. He meant that she was an elsie, not a woman.

"Sar," she said wearily, "I have heard more insolence than you could heap on me if you devoted your entire life to it. After a time it provokes no reaction. Whether you hate elsies because you think they should not exist or because you want to be one yourself is irrelevant."

"All the same, I'll tell you, Vanessa Gort. I hate them because I think they shouldn't exist."

"Right, now we've disposed of that, can we go on? Or should I talk to your cap after all?"

"You can talk to me. You've been threatened with disfiguration. Unless what?"

"Unless I pay five million dols."

The young sar began for the first time to look interested. "Not exactly a modest demand. Even from an elsie. May I ask how old you are?"

"Over four hundred. I forget the exact figure. If you mean, could I pay, the answer is yes. I don't choose to pay."

"Meanness?"

"On principle."

"What was the man like?"

"He wore a mask. He called himself the Avenger, a ridiculous melodramatic name. Incidentally, before you ask, I've never done anything that anybody could possibly want to avenge."

"In four hundred years?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Never — in four hundred years."

"Well, if you say so . . . How often has this man called?"

"Three times."

"Good. If he's called three times he'll call again. And we'll catch him."

There was a pause.

"Is that all?" Vanessa asked.

"Isn't it enough? Are you officially demanding protection?"

"No. The man is probably, as you seem to think, a harmless crank. I don't like making a fuss. I was reluctant to call you at all."

"So it seems, since you waited until he'd called three times. Do you plan to go out this afternoon?"

"Only to the beauty salon in this building. I needn't give you the address, I suppose."

"Quite unnecessary," Smith agreed drily. "Although I don't happen to know all about you offhand, it will be easy to obtain any information about you we may need. You have, after all, been around for four centuries."

"It will be all right to go to the salon?"

"Better stay in your apartment."

"My private elevator admits me direct to the interior. And only clients with appointments are admitted." She added significantly: "No men under any circumstances."

"Then I guess it's okay, provided you leave your apartment quite secure. I'll report all this to Cap Zagreb, and he'll decide what action to take."

II

After switching off, Sar Smith arranged to have all Vanessa Gort's calls monitored, recorded and traced. Then he got up and went to the file receiver.

Why, he was wondering, was this sort of thing relatively uncommon? Of course, considering the power the elsies controlled, only a fool or a brave man would attempt anything of the sort. But there were plenty of fools and brave men in the world.

He turned the first scanner to ELSIE and the second to THREATS. Nothing happened, so he turned the second scanner to EXTORTION WITH MENACES. The third he set at SUMMARY, the fourth at LAST FIVE YEARS. Then he pressed the button.

The printer began to chatter. In a matter of seconds he was able to tear off the first page.

There had been no more than four attempts at extortion with menaces from elsies in the last five years — one in Germany, one in Italy, one in South Afri-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ca and one in Australia. In each case the full might of the Elsie Council had been called in by the local authorities and the criminal had been found and imprisoned before he had a chance to blow his nose.

That was it, no doubt. You had more chance of robbing a bank successfully than of jostling an elsie in the street and getting away with it. Despots in ancient history had had the power to have a man eviscerated so that they could warm their feet in the cavity of his abdomen. Although the elsies had no such power officially, their unofficial power made the ancient despots seem petty.

Sar Smith was aware that he had been both a brave man and a fool to bait an elsie. If she wished, Vanessa Gort could get him fired and make it practically impossible for him to get another job.

The printer had already stopped. Four minor attempts at extortion. No more.

The file was, however, set for crime — which meant, by definition, acts by people responsible for their actions. Smith cut in the psychotic file and pressed the button again.

This time the printer was much busier.

There were ninety-eight cases of threats by psychotics. Two elsies had actually been killed, one in South Africa and one in Greece. Nineteen had been injured. Again, all the psychotics responsible had been caught sooner or later.

It figured, Smith thought. You didn't threaten elsies if you were sane. If you were insane, eventually somebody noticed it.

With the sheets from the printer in his hand he tapped on Cap Zagreb's door.

"Do come in," Zagreb's fruity voice invited.

Smith entered. Zagreb, already overweight, was making matters worse by eating candied fruit.

The faint astringency of the relationship between the cap and his sar could have been sensed at once had there been anyone present to sense it. Smith was young and sensitive; Zagreb was ironically cynical. Smith was a plebeian cop and too conscious of it; Zagreb was a cultured patrician who might have been expected to be an elsie instead of a police cap. Smith was 23; Zagreb was 57.

"Well? Are you here on matters of state, Smith, or is this merely a social call?"

"A female elsie has been threatened, sir. Threatened with disfiguration by a masked man calling himself the Avenger. He has phoned three times."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Hardly an unusual situation, Smith. It would be unusual, however, if anything were to come of it."

"Yes, sir."

"Has the lady a name? It's not beyond the bounds of possibility that I may have met her socially. I move in exalted circles, Smith."

"Vanessa Gort."

"Indeed?" A candied apricot hung motionless in mid-air. "It behooves us to take the matter more seriously, Smith. Vanessa Gort is a woman of character."

"An elsie, sir."

"Quite. Immortals can possess character too, you know."

"You mean because she's a woman of character the threat is less likely to be the work of a crank, sir?"

"I mean that Vanessa Gort would not have reported the matter to us unless she thought it might not be. I assume you have taken the routine steps, Smith. She lives alone. Presumably you told her not to go out?"

"She's going to the beauty salon in the same building, sir. I said it would be all right."

The phone rang. It was an emergency call on the sound-only police line. The cap picked up the receiver and listened. His expression did not change.

"It was not," he said, putting down the instrument.

"Not what, sir?" Smith asked.

"Not all right. Vanessa Gort has been slashed in the beauty salon. I think we'd better get over there at once."

Rather to Smith's relief, though he would never have admitted it, Zagreb himself went straight to the Gort apartment, sending Smith to the beauty salon to find out what he could there.

The proprietress, twittering with shock, was no help at all. The presence of a police sar in her salon seemed almost as incredible to her as a knife attack on a client, and an elsie at that. (No men admitted under any circumstances, Vanessa Gort had said.)

Nobody had seen what had happened. Miss Gort had been found in a pool of her own blood, quite conscious and rational. She had insisted on going right back to her apartment instead of waiting in the salon for a doctor.

One of the manicurists was more helpful. The attack must, she said, have been by a woman who had given her name as Sara Blair, 137 Caxton Apartments. This woman had made an appointment and had been photographed when she arrived. But she had not kept her appointment and was not in the salon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Indeed, nobody had seen her, with the possible exception of Vanessa Gort.

"Yet she was photographed?" Smith said.

Apparently every client was automatically photographed on arrival — a safeguard, Smith guessed, against subsequent nonpayment of bills rather than against more spectacular crime.

Smith took the photograph and looked up at the manicurist after a glance. "Do your clients often arrive dressed like this?"

"Oh, yes. Those who live in the building arrive direct from their apartments. And we also have an autocar terminal."

"I see."

The photograph was a good, clear, full-length color picture of a very pretty girl with a towel round her hips and another over her shoulders. She wore gold slippers.

Something not quite right about her strongly suggested that she was wearing a mask. That was obvious anyway. The face didn't go with her figure. Although the loose towels concealed the lines of her body better than a street dress, the impression came through that Sara Blair was older than the eighteen-year-old face she wore.

There was nothing more to be done in the salon. Sara Blair was probably still in her autocar in one of the underground tunnels or overhead tubes, but there was no way of tracing it. It hardly seemed worth while racing to Caxton Apartments in the naive hope that the woman would emerge from the autocar terminal there.

Zagreb admitted Smith to Vanessa Gort's apartment. The injured elsie, her face bandaged, reclined on a divan.

"You were wrong, Sar Smith," she said through the bandages. "It was not safe for me to keep my appointment."

Smith opened his mouth, but it was Zagreb who answered. "We've been into that already, Miss Gort. There can be no allegation that Sar Smith instructed you *not* to remain in this apartment, as any sensible person who took the threats seriously would have done. The responsibility of going out was entirely yours. Smith assumed, as you evidently did yourself, that in a place which only women could enter you would be safe from a male extortionist. But you were attacked by a woman — which means that at least two people are involved."

The woman on the divan nodded wearily. "I'm making no complaint. But there can hardly be congratulation either. I guess you know what this means to me. No elsie can heal. Normal

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

metabolism must be restored, at very considerable cost, for six weeks or more. At the end of that time I'll be completely healed, true, with no visible scar, but I can only become an elsie again at the usual tremendous cost."

"I am sure," Zagreb said smoothly, "that you are insured."

"Of course I'm insured. Do you think that makes me quite happy to . . . oh, let it go."

"Perhaps you now wish that you had paid the five million demanded?"

She sat up. "Certainly not," she said firmly.

Zagreb nodded. "I understand. The . . . uh . . . Avenger was beyond all doubt a man?"

"Beyond all doubt."

"And you were attacked by a woman. So two people are involved, people prepared to challenge the considerable power of the various elsie organizations which will undoubtedly take up this case . . . I hesitate, for reasons of modesty, even to mention the efforts of Sar Smith and myself."

"I've been thinking about that. Anyone who knew me would know I'd refuse. I don't think I was ever supposed to pay the money. I was supposed to refuse and be slashed."

Zagreb nodded again. "I am gratified to have my own theory so succinctly stated. You believe then, that this is the first move in a campaign to extort money from other elsies?"

"Or myself, later."

"I think, given your full cooperation, we can guarantee your safety from now on, Miss Gort. Although you have already told Sar Smith that you've never done anything that anyone could possibly want to avenge, I must ask you to make an effort of memory —"

"I've already done that. I'm quite certain. I don't go around injuring people. I can think of nobody who could even believe himself or herself to have a genuine grievance against me."

"One other thing, then. Please describe your attacker in as much detail as possible."

"I scarcely saw her. It was in the corridor leading from the elevators. My name was spoken and I turned. I suppose I closed my eyes as the scalpel came at me —"

"Scalpel?"

"Something like that. All I saw was that the woman was young, dark-haired, of average height. I half fainted. I don't even know where she went."

While she was talking Smith had handed Zagreb the photograph of Sara Blair. When Zag-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reb showed it to Vanessa, she said at once: "Yes. That's her."

Zagreb gave the photograph back to Smith. "Well, go on, Smith. Find her."

"Sara Blair must be a false name, sir."

"Of course."

"She won't be at this address."

"Naturally not."

"This isn't her own face. She's wearing a mask."

"One presumes so," Zagreb sighed. "What are you waiting for?"

III

At Caxton Apartments, by no means to his surprise, Smith drew a complete blank. Nobody knew a girl resembling Sara Blair, which was only to be expected, since she would scarcely wear the same mask all over the city to enable the police to trace all her movements before and after the attack.

Smith considered checking on all the women in the block between seventeen and forty-five, but when he found there were over five hundred of them he decided not to bother.

When he returned to police HQ he found Zagreb eating a banana.

"We are famous, Smith," Zagreb told him. "Or rather, infamous."

He handed the sar a sheaf of photostats, clips from the news service prints which the HQ information room monitored round the clock. Whenever anything happened anywhere, police HQ knew it at least as soon as the television news editors.

"How did the news service get the story, sir?" Smith asked.

"I gave it to them. I want this right out in the open, Smith. Extortionists and blackmailers thrive in the dark. They shrivel up and die in the full glare of public investigation."

Cap Zagreb was in charge of the case, the reports said. But there was already a suggestion that the Elsie Council would not be satisfied with a routine investigation.

"I guess not," Smith said with dry bitterness. "Elsies are important. Elsies matter. They're the salt of the earth. They're the people who can afford to buy immortality at something over a million dols a throw. And since they do go on living, power tends to get stuck in their hands. They don't put up Presidents, police commissioners or governors, but they make sure they're always in a position to put all the pressure they want on anybody who holds authority anywhere. The elsies are only one thousandth of the population, but they hold seventy per cent of the power."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Zagreb had been listening with polite interest. "Have you finished, Smith?" he asked.

"No, sir. The elsies have stopped space travel and everything else that they consider too dangerous for them. If we went into space and they didn't, human communities might grow up somewhere not under elsie control. They've rebuilt every major city so that no elsie can get killed in a street accident. They've taken over Florida as a Retreat for any elsie who doesn't want to be contaminated by the very sight of an ordinary human being. The Elsie Council fights every verbal, economic, social, psychological or physical attack on any elsie so fiercely that nobody dares to brush an elsie in the street or open his mouth about them."

"Come, now. It can scarcely be said, Smith, that you are not at this moment daring to open your mouth."

Ignoring this, Smith went on: "There's only one elsie for every hundred thousand of us — yet the whole world is run for them."

"Do feel free, sar, to say anything more you wish."

The sar frowned at his superior. "Is there anything I've said that's untrue, sir?"

"You spoke the truth and nothing but the truth, but by no means the whole truth. If you had a million dols, Smith, would there be anything to stop you becoming an elsie?"

"Nothing would ever make me join them, sir. I'm going to live out my life as a human being — not as a living corpse."

"There we have it, Smith. Immortals are known as elsies from the initials LC, indicating living corpse. Like many not exactly complimentary descriptions, the name has stuck. Immortals are, indeed, living corpses, and they're not even immortal. It is as easy to kill an immortal as to kill anyone else. Cut them and they bleed — as we have recent cause to know. Elsies are merely people who do not age. Nothing more than that, nothing less."

"Cap, why are we talking like this?" Smith demanded.

"You are young," Zagreb ruminated. "And intolerant. When you're older you will not, one hopes, make such definite statements before learning all the facts."

"What facts don't I know, sir? What's the big secret?"

"No secret, Smith. Nothing you could not find out if you wished. The trouble is you don't wish. I suspect, for instance, that you assume unthinkingly that elsies are rich simply because they're elsies."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Smith looked surprised. As a matter of fact, he did. "Since the process costs over a million and it has to be done before you're thirty-five, it stands to reason —"

"I'm not talking about that, precisely. Most elsies are treated at the expense of parents too old, by the time they make their pile, to become elsies themselves. What I mean is: how, simply by living indefinitely, does one become very rich?"

"You can invest money at compound interest and wait until it multiplies itself."

"True, but where does the money come from and what do you live on while it grows?"

"Parents who can pay a million usually leave quite a bit when they die."

"Also true, but you're still missing the point, sar. The longer you live the more you spend. Vanessa Gort has spent, on a rough estimate, some twenty-five million dols and probably possesses at least ten million more. Where did she get it?"

"She was left money, I guess."

"She was left nothing but immortality. Four centuries ago, at the age of twenty-five, she received no legacy from her father but the elsie treatment."

"Then other legacies since —"

"It doesn't work that way, Smith. It never has. Property passes forward, not backwards. Brothers and sisters and cousins of elsies leave their money to their own children, and it keeps going right on down — never back to the great-aunt or great-great-uncle who became an elsie. Go on, sar. Tell me where elsies get their money."

"If you go on living for centuries —"

"I've told you," Zagreb sighed, "going on living isn't enough. What else do elsies have to do?"

"Work, I guess."

"Exactly. Elsies who become rich and powerful and important have to work for their riches and power and importance."

"And what does that prove, sir?"

For the first time Zagreb showed exasperation. "If you can't see that for yourself, Smith, I wonder how you ever manage to catch the most incompetent criminal —"

The visiphone on Zagreb's desk buzzed peremptorily. Knowing all calls were monitored, the cap switched on at once. No call switched through to him could be refused.

"Cap Zagreb," he said.

The lean face on the screen said: "I'm Henry Fax, president of the Elsie Council."

"Yes," Zagreb said. "I've been expecting you to call."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Zagreb, we're not going to interfere in any way with your investigation into the Gort case. But as you can understand, the criminal simply *must* be found. Anything you want, absolutely anything, will be arranged the moment you request it."

"Thank you. The police organization is, however, moderately well equipped and staffed."

"Kind of thing I mean. Your sar just made inquiries about Sara Blair at Caxton Apartments. If you want the entire list of 1327 occupants checked out by private investigators, just say the word."

"I'll bear your offer in mind, Mr. Fax."

"Or if you want a law passed so that any area in which this criminal is known to be can be closed off, even a whole city, let me know."

"I shall, Mr. Fax, I shall."

"Another thing — suppose all wearing of masks was banned. That might simplify matters for you."

"It might. And again, we might find all our time and attention taken up with charging people who were doing nothing more criminal than wearing a mask. One small thing occurs to me. I'd like the unofficial assistance of a female elsie. A volunteer, of course — to work with my sar."

Smith's head jerked up.

"There might be danger for this . . . volunteer?" Fax said.

"There appears to be danger for all elsies at the moment. Admittedly anyone who offered to help might find herself with more than her fair share."

"I'll find somebody."

Zagreb completed his arrangements with Henry Fax and switched off.

"Cap, what's in your mind?" Smith demanded.

"Vagueness. One of my vague ideas is that you may have to become an elsie."

"Huh?"

"In name and appearance only, of course."

"You can tell an elsie at a glance."

"How, Smith?"

"You know as well as I do, sir."

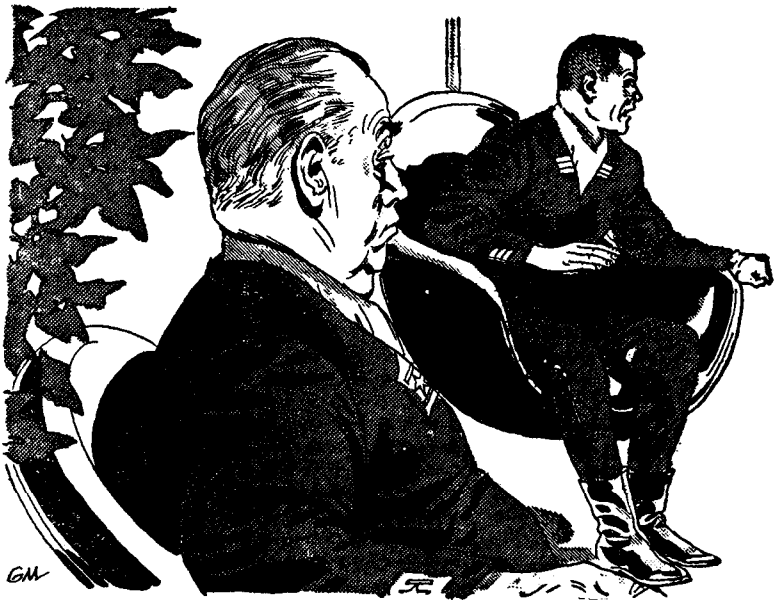
"Tell me all the same. How do you instantly recognize an elsie as such?"

"Well . . . take two ordinary girls, one twenty-two and one twenty-eight. The girl of twenty-two isn't exactly in early adolescence, and the girl of twenty-eight hasn't even started to decay. Yet most people can tell that one is about twenty-two and the other about twenty-eight."

Zagreb nodded.

"How do you tell that a girl's twenty-eight and not twenty-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



two? I guess by her eyes, expression, maturity, experience . . . It's not lines or skin flaws or anything like that. A girl of twenty-eight can be lineless and flawless. Yet you still know. Now take a woman who's lived one hundred sixty-five years. She can have the body of an eighteen-year-old girl and the most perfect complexion you ever saw. She usually does. Yet you only have to glance at her and you know she's an elsie."

"Precisely. So take an elsie who really is twenty-five. How do you know then?"

"Well . . . you don't sir."

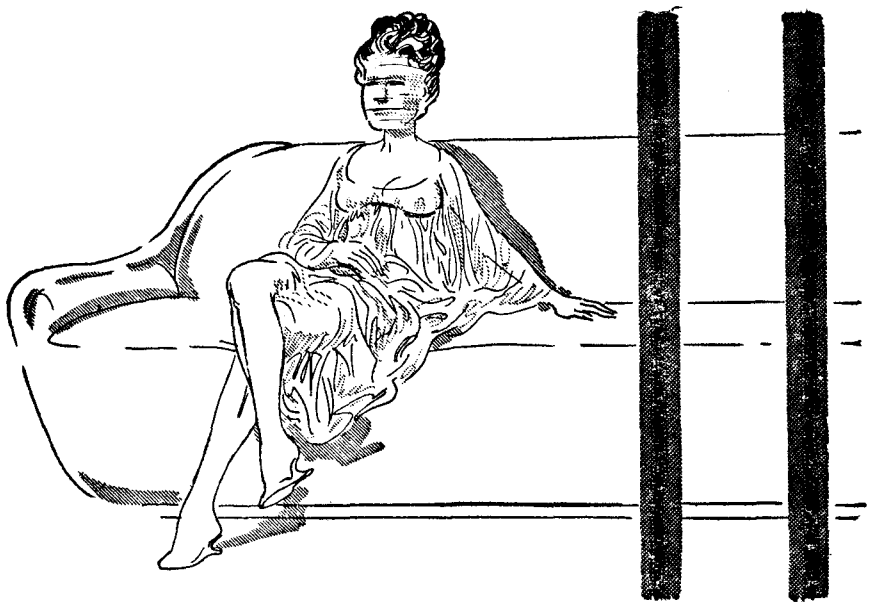
"*Quod erat demonstrandum.* Meantime, however, since I expect it will take some time for the situation to develop, all I want you to do is visit all the elsies in this area and ask if they have been threatened."

"Yes, sir." This was a normal, routine assignment. Vanessa Gort might or might not be the first elsie threatened by Sara Blair and her partner. The others, if any, might or might not have paid up quietly. It was obviously sensible to find out.

"We'll continue our interesting discussion on the rights and wrongs of the elsie situation later," Zagreb said. "Meantime, write your report and get on with your job."

"No further orders, sir?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



The Zagreb eyebrows went up in his characteristic expression of pained surprise. "Have I ever tied your hands, Smith?"

"No, sir."

"Have I not always shown a rather touching faith in the capabilities of my assistants?"

"You could put it that way, sir. *They* might say that you expect miracles."

"Very well, Smith. Go thou and perform a miracle."

IV

Three days and six elsies later, Smith had to admit to himself that there had been some justification for Zagreb's accusation that he had sounded off about elsies without knowing much about them. Although meeting and talking to elsies did not change Smith's views in any significant particular, he realized that there was more to being an immortal than met the eye.

Homer Daniels was a quiet little man who didn't want anyone to know he was an elsie. In the nature of things this was impossible. He did, however, do his best by living quietly, changing his abode regularly, and invariably going out masked.

Smith was forced to admit that Daniels was no megalomaniac and that there was little luxury in his life. He had given up prac-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tically everything for one thing only: perpetual stalemate in the battle of life and death.

Blanche Morton was a nymphomaniac. The number of men she had had, or vice versa, must be staggering, since she had lived for three hundred years and still had the body of a girl of eighteen. Smith suspected that what she got from immortality, what she wanted, was not really eternal life. It was, first, the reassurance that whether, however and whenever she did eventually die, she would never have known old or even middle age; and, second, the certainty that no elsie could have children.

Jim Stephens lived an eternal life of terror. He knew that any major scratch would be enough to force him to surrender his immortality, and that there was no guarantee that the restoration process would be entirely successful. He had nearly died the first time. He was convinced he would die the second time. Ergo, a scratch would kill him. So he guarded himself like a fortune in fine crystal.

Helen Bauer was that rarity, an elsie who had not had the treatment until she was in her forties, and yet had survived. Smith envied her least of all. Suspension in eternal youth was one thing, suspension in middle age quite another.

Jo Seymour was perhaps the best adjusted of the six. She had fun, she had a vast fortune, and she was sufficiently free of Stephen's terror to ski and skate and swim. She had undergone the treatment four times after injury.

Blake Smedley was the only one of the six who resembled Smith's theoretical elsie. He had vast power and he liked to use it. No mask for him. When he strode into the non-elsie world, everything about him proclaimed that he was one of the elite.

All denied having been threatened.

"But Stephens is worth watching," Smith reported to Zagreb. "Either he's lying or he soon will be approached. When he is, he'll pay."

"Stephens," Zagreb ruminated, "being the one who's terrified he may cut his finger?"

"He'll never cut his finger, sir. I was searched before I saw him to make sure I carried nothing as dangerous as a pin. There isn't a knife in the house that would cut anything tougher than butter."

"Do I detect a certain diminution in your jealousy of elsies, Smith?"

"Jealousy, sir? I was never jealous of them."

"No? Well, let that pass. When

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

we were interrupted in our previous discussion, I had pointed out that no one with a million dols is excluded from the ranks of elsies. Since the treatment costs a million dols, demanding greater skill than any surgical operation ever performed, is there anything unfair about this?"

"I didn't say it was unfair."

"No? I was under the impression you did. However. Payment of a million dols by no means guarantees success. In some forty per cent of all cases, immediate death results. In another thirty per cent, although the treatment is not fatal, it is not successful either. Of course, they can try again. Thus of those who can pay and want to become elsies, only forty-two per cent succeed."

"I don't quite get your drift, sir."

"Perhaps not . . . perhaps I have no drift, Smith. But remember this — only the cream of the men and women who become elsies *do* last for centuries. You know perfectly well that the suicide rate among elsies is high. Ironic, isn't it? A less spectacular thinning of the ranks occurs in a very natural way: most elsies who have to revert to normal metabolism in order to heal simply don't have the cash for the restoration process."

"Well, sir?"

"So the elsies who have been around for a long time are on the whole highly intelligent, competent, prudent, successful men and women."

"Maybe."

"I'll accept that somewhat grudging admission and go on. Then I must point out that we share in all the benefits which the elsies have provided for themselves. I believe you said — quote — they've rebuilt every major city so that no elsie can get killed in a street accident — unquote. How many non-elsies get killed in street accidents in such cities, Smith?"

"None, sir."

"Quite. You also remarked that they took over Florida as an Elsie Retreat — by force of arms, Smith?"

"No, sir. They paid for it. Billions.

"Once again, quite. Talking of the Retreat, Smith — you are going there."

"I, sir? I'm not an elsie."

"You will not go as Sar Smith. Nor will you go alone. But first — there have been more threats."

"You didn't tell me."

"I'm telling you now. Three elsies in other cities have been threatened. They all departed immediately for the Retreat."

"Well, that's sensible. They're safe there."

"None of the calls were traced,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but we have recordings of two of them. The elsies concerned had taken the precaution of recording all calls."

"Pity they didn't go further and let us trace all their calls."

"They did. I should not have said the calls were untraced, but that the information didn't help us It only takes a moment to step out of a public call-box and get very thoroughly lost . . . Let's watch the recordings."

He pressed a switch. A blank face came on the screen. It was a poor mask. The quality of face masks depended, naturally, on their expense. A mask like this was obviously a mask, but it effectively concealed the identity of the wearer nevertheless. A mask like the one worn by Sara Blair would have needed very close examination before it could be identified as a mask.

"Cyril Black," the blank face said, "this is the Avenger. You will pay five million dols or what happened to Vanessa Gort will also happen to you. Since you're a man, a threat to your face might not perhaps be so effective. Your belly will be slashed and you will suffer a good deal of pain."

The screen went blank.

"That all?" Smith said. "No answer expected, no arrangement for collecting the cash?"

"Evidently this is a preliminary call, made to see what Cyril Black would do. What he did do was depart for the Retreat — as thousands of other elsies are doing."

"There's room for them," Smith said drily. "Florida at one time had a population of twenty-five million. And there are only about thirty-five thousand elsies in the whole world."

"True. Let's watch the second recording."

Zagreb pressed the switch again. This time it was the face of a girl which appeared. It was the face of Sara Blair. She said:

"Betty Slessinger, Vanessa Gort is a friend of yours. She refused to pay five million. I'm sure you won't."

Smith blinked as the face abruptly disappeared. The message was certainly short, if not sweet.

"You've had the voices analyzed?" he said.

"Unfortunately the extortionists have heard about voice identification as well as face and fingerprint identification. The voices in both cases were modified by throat resonators. Betty Slessinger also departed for the Retreat — she is there now."

Zagreb reached out toward the intercom. "Send in the lady when she arrives."

"She's just come, sir."

"Very well, send her in now."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That's the elsie volunteer? Who is she?"

"You'll see in a moment."

"What's the idea, sir?"

"As a twenty-five-year-old elsie alone, you wouldn't fool anyone for long Smith. As the companion of the volunteer whom Henry Fax has found for us, you should have no trouble being as conspicuous or inconspicuous as you like."

The door opened and Jo Seymour came in. Of course. She was the only elsie Smith had come across who took chances with her precious eternal youth and didn't squeal when they didn't come off.

Smith and Jo Seymour were at the airport, and Smith was just about to don the identity of Frank Sharp, a genuine twenty-five-year-old English elsie who had agreed to stay under cover until further notice, when an airport cop came and told him he was wanted at police HQ.

"Miss Seymour can wait here," the cop said. "You won't be long. You'll catch the next plane."

Zagreb wasted no time when Smith arrived. "Things have happened," he said with unusual terseness. "The Avenger tried to slash Blake Smedley, but failed. He was lucky to get away. It was a rather poor effort — yet the fact that such an attempt was made, without a prior demand for money, has naturally worried elsies all over the world quite considerably. The other thing has worried them even more. Betty Slessinger had been slashed inside the Retreat."

"Inside the Retreat?" Smith exclaimed. "But nobody who isn't an elsie can possibly get inside."

"You seem to forget that you are on your way there yourself. And that you will certainly get inside."

"But the Elsie Council knows about me, sir."

"Yes. It should be remembered, stringent as the precautions are, that no foolproof check has so far been made on arrivals at the Retreat. It should also be remembered that instead of perhaps a dozen arrivals a day, the check-points have recently had to deal with thousands. However it happened, Sara Blair most certainly did get in the Retreat. And there she slashed Betty Slessinger exactly as Vanessa Gort was slashed."

"You're sure it's Sara Blair?"

"I am. There's another photograph." He passed it across the table.

It was a poor photograph, taken by a camera which was part of a very elementary alarm system — the kind that might be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

expected to be installed in houses inside the Retreat if there was an alarm system at all.

Poor as it was, the girl who was shown running from the house was undoubtedly Sara Blair, wearing her usual mask.

"Something bothers you, Smith?" Zagreb inquired, after a pause.

"The whole picture, sir. Vanessa Gort was threatened. Anyone who knew her knew she wouldn't pay. She was slashed. Smedley wasn't even threatened, yet the Avenger tried to get him. Betty Slessinger was threatened but given no chance to pay. She was slashed —"

"Where does this lead us?" Zagreb asked, with an expression which suggested he was already there.

"It's not extortion at all, sir. The Avenger really believes he has something to avenge. He just hates elsies."

Zagreb leaned back and examined the ceiling. "Such a scheme would, I presume, have your entire approval, Smith?"

"It's my job to catch whoever's behind it, sir."

"Exactly. Now you can continue your journey to the Retreat — knowing that Sara Blair is there."

"Someone who could get in could get out."

"Not so, Smith. At the beginning of all campaigns mistakes are made. This one is no exception. Then organization is tightened up, and fewer mistakes are made. You can take my word for it that however masked, dressed, disguised or transported, Sara Blair will not get out of the Retreat."

"So I'm to catch her, sir?"

"You are."

"I'll get back to the airport then, sir, if that's all."

"Do that, Smith. One further thing. Although I propose to remain here at the moment, if there are any further developments within the Retreat, I shall ask the Elsie Council to invite me in officially and openly. It would, of course, be more convenient if you succeeded in solving the whole affair without my assistance —"

"But that, sir, is hardly to be expected," said Smith drily.

"No," Zagreb sighed.

V

Even on short air journeys elsies like Jo Seymour were accustomed to the luxury of a private cabin. Smith, masked and dressed as Frank Sharp, was therefore able to talk freely to her.

His attitude toward Jo Seymour, whom he had now met five times, was ambivalent. She was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an elsie, and he still disliked and resented elsies for an amalgam of reasons; yet she was the elsie he liked best. So a man who hated all Spaniards might say grudgingly of a particular man: he's okay — for a Spaniard.

Her two centuries of life had left no physical mark on her except for a few minor scars, the result of playgirl accidents. From her mind they had removed all petty resentment and desire to score off her fellow-beings, elsie or otherwise.

"Well?" she invited, soon after takeoff. "Do you tell me what's happened, or don't you?"

She was sitting demurely on a massive-looking window seat, her back to the clouds. Her dress was red, short, and highly provocative. And Smith was provoked.

"That depends," he said. "How close are you and I supposed to be?"

"Not as close as you might think," she said, smiling. "Men are not a particular weakness of mine."

"You'd travel about with a guy like Frank Sharp and live in the same house with him and sleep alone?"

"Yes. Elsies don't have to be in a hurry."

"I see." Anyway, he told her what had happened and asked her: "From your experience as an elsie, would you say that the Avenger and his girl-friend could possibly be elsies?"

"It isn't likely, is it?"

"It's more likely now than it was. Plenty of crooks of one kind or another have tried to get into the Retreat, knowing how much loot in cash and valuables is lying around inside, and knowing there are no cops. But nobody ever succeeded. How did Sara Blair manage it if she isn't an elsie?"

"Slipped in with the crowd."

"Maybe. Anyway, how about answering the question? Could elsies try anything like this?"

Jo considered the question seriously. "They'd have to be utterly desperate. And I don't think they'd get away with it. You see, there aren't all that many elsies and we live a long time. I don't say every elsie knows every other elsie, but we know each other and about each other pretty well. If an elsie existed who was capable of this sort of thing, somebody would know, would tell the Elsie Council, and they'd get at the truth in a matter of hours."

"It could be the work of a couple of elsie psychopaths."

Jo shook her head definitely. "The Council knows all about the psychotics among us. There aren't so many, you know. Known psychopaths aren't aced for treatment, and the treat-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment tends to prevent the occurrence of major psychological upsets. Besides — psychopaths generally work alone. You don't get two of them cooperating smoothly on the same crazy scheme."

"Maybe one wants money and the other is crazy."

"Perhaps."

There was no opportunity for further discussion, for the plane was already landing ten miles outside the border of the Retreat. No flying was permitted over the area; any ship of any kind which tried it was automatically destroyed by chaser missiles. Approach by sea was equally impossible. The only way in or out was through the seven checkpoints.

Despite his disguise and being in the company of a genuine elsie, Smith would have stood no chance of getting inside the Retreat had he not arrived, by arrangement, at a checkpoint where Henry Fax himself had taken charge of the screening.

None of the other elsies who arrived at the same time, half a dozen or so, could have noticed anything out of the ordinary about the way Smith was treated. The only difference was that the result of the tests made on him was ignored.

Given a blood sample, it was quite easy to determine whether a person was an elsie or not. The perpetual youth process halted the diminution of the elasticity of the coats of the arteries. The capillaries therefore remained sufficiently supplied, and the normal progress of senility was permanently frozen — at costs which were well known. The whole organism replaced its cells with machine-like regularity and exactitude. No major change was allowed to take place. Thus elsies remained at the same height and weight, immune to age, immune to disease — but terrifyingly vulnerable to the slightest injury.

So no blood sample was ever taken from an elsie. The prick never healed, the blood removed never replaced itself. You couldn't have a frozen metabolic pattern and at the same time obligingly versatile cells which took over the functions of different cells.

Elsie's bodies were like intricate charcoal sketches waxed over. So long as the wax was undamaged, the sketches lasted for ever. Once the wax was broken, the charcoal became mere loose carbon, as vulnerable as sand castles washed by the tide of time.

The new tightened check no longer relied on documents, the Elsie Register and a psychologi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cal and memory test. It was based, prosaically, on the fact that no matter how much elsies ate or drank, they had to return to a basic weight. Thus above a certain level of nourishment the body simply refused to accept food. It was rejected one way or another practically unmodified.

This test was unpleasant and slow, but it was certain.

"You're Henry Fax, aren't you?" Smith-Sharp asked as he ate his third meal in two hours. "You don't usually spend your time working as a frontier guard, do you?"

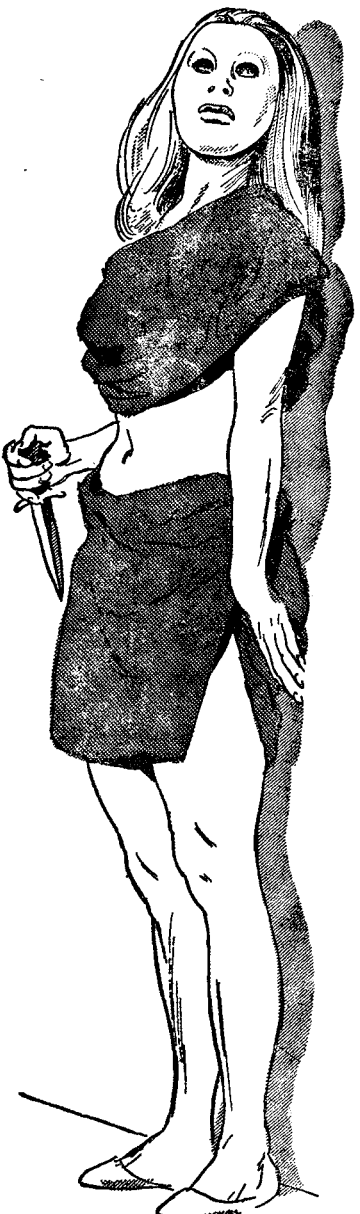
"I don't," said Fax grimly, "but this area really is a retreat now. There are twenty-five thousand of us here. That only leaves about eight thousand elsies in the rest of the world."

"Are elsies still flocking here, then?" Smith asked. "Despite the news?"

"You mean that Sara Blair is in the Retreat. No, they're not. You can see for yourself. Thousands in the last few days, a handful today. Mostly our people want out, not in. We're not letting them out."

"Why not?"

"We know that Sara Blair is inside," said Fax slowly. "Whatever happens — *whatever happens* — nobody leaves the Retreat until she's found."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The message, Smith rightly assumed, was not intended for Frank Sharp but for Sar Smith.

The Retreat was a playground for gods and goddesses, every one of whom had an Achilles heel. The only transport was a railcar system. There were never any mishaps on rail journeys and nobody could possibly be hurt in street accidents. There were no animals or reptiles. The face of the whole terrain had been carefully smoothed so that it was very difficult to fall from any height. Every possible safeguard in the rivers and lakes guarded against swimming accidents, and there was no water-skiing. The promenades were of soft plastic and no flight of steps lacked a banister.

It was like the court where nothing existed which might prick the princess's finger.

Inside the Retreat, the eternally youthful elsies lived in a country-club life denuded of all physically dangerous pursuits. Tennis, swimming, sunbathing, carefully stewarded golf, walking, parties and gambling were in; climbing, riding, all kinds of shooting, fencing and sparring were out. Even bicycles were forbidden. Too many people fell off bicycles, they could travel too fast, and there were bicycle-pedestrian accidents.

There was no law enforcement. There didn't need to be. Elsies didn't run the risk of being punished by elsies, of being outlawed. More than that, they didn't run the risk of injury. Only Jo Seymour and a few others took such risks, and they took care not to involve any other elsies.

Expenses in the Retreat were enormous, and for no high standard of luxury at that. The reason was simply that since nobody but elsies was allowed in, elsies had to do all the work — all the cooking, serving, cleaning, repairing, lifting and carrying. Only those who needed the money would do it, and only for an extortionate return.

Smith saw only a little of this on his first day in the Retreat, for he and Jo were not released inside until early evening. The checkpoint closed at night.

Invited to a party a few hours later at Henry Fax's enormous mansion, they had accepted. It was no part of Smith's assignment to sit at home in the chalet Jo Seymour maintained by the side of a lake. He had to see everything that there was to see.

Jo's chalet being less than half a mile from Henry Fax's house, they went to the chalet first, opened it up, showered and changed, and then walked

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to the party, there being no other way of getting there.

For a moment, when Smith entered the huge ballroom with Jo, the blaze of light blinded him. Then, when he was able to take in the scene, what he saw dazed and shocked him.

He had arrived at parties before, cold sober, when everyone present was already in an advanced stage of hysterical, frenetic inebriation. And although he had seldom been present as a guest at any particularly wild party, he had attended quite a few parties of this type in the line of duty.

He had never seen anything like this.

Beside him, Jo murmured: "Don't look like that, or everybody will know you're not one of us."

It was necessary for her to warn him, he admitted, but the phrasing saddened and sickened him.

She was saying that *she* was one of this crowd.

Smith was aware academically that elsies could get drunker than anyone else. Normal metabolism allowed the intake of only so much alcohol and then took drastic measures to stop it. Elsies could drink whisky like lemonade, getting rid of the bulk within a very short time and retaining the alcohol.

In the middle of the floor the men and women who were still capable of dancing danced. They were a handsome lot. No one looked older than twenty-five, and those who were still dancing hadn't reached the stage that most of the others had.

Most of the girls and some of the men sprawled around had removed at least part of their clothing. (Perhaps, Smith had to admit to himself, non-elsie parties might have different conventions on this kind of exhibitionism if everybody present had the kind of shape which could stand being revealed.)

Elsies had to get into the best possible physical shape during the initial treatment. Thereafter they kept this same shape, perhaps for centuries.

The only woman present who did not have the kind of figure which could stand revelation was Helen Bauer. And she, Smith observed, was taking no part in the amateur strip-tease.

So this was how the people who really mattered enjoyed themselves.

"Dance?" said Jo.

Smith nodded, and they moved onto the floor.

Half an hour later, when they went out on the veranda for air, he said curtly: "I don't think much of elsie parties. Are they always like this?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No," Jo said. "Haven't you noticed something? I haven't had more than a couple of drinks. Neither has Henry Fax. The girl who's operating the music isn't drinking at all. Helen Bauer is as sober as we are. So are a dozen others — the ones who are the least scared."

"I see. The Avenger and his girl friend really have this lot worried. So they drink themselves incapable."

"That's about it. Can you blame them?"

"Easily," said Smith drily, "but it's no part of my job."

They went inside and danced again. Smith would have preferred to stay exclusively in Jo's company, but he wouldn't learn much that way. He therefore let himself be introduced to anyone who could still talk.

He had three invitations to private parties consisting of two, taking place at once somewhere within the huge house.

"And really," Jo said the next time they took the air, "if you particularly want to avoid suspicion that you're not an elsie, you shouldn't turn them down so bluntly. At least half a dozen people have been asking me about you. They're not suspicious, exactly, they just wonder who you are and how a man like you comes to be here."

Smith grunted.

They were leaving the party an hour later when uproar broke out. A girl out on the veranda was screaming.

Smith ran to the veranda and pushed his way through the chattering, terrified, suddenly sober men and women who were staring in fascination at what the screaming girl had found.

Henry Fax lay on the ground, his throat cut so deeply that his head was almost severed from his body.

VI

Smith did not elect to announce his identity and start taking statements from everybody at the party. With a team of detectives to guard the doors, herd the guests together and take the house and gardens apart in search of the smallest clue, he might have been able to accomplish something. As it was, with no disciplined, trained men he could call upon, he preferred to remain Frank Sharp and see what he could see, which wasn't much.

Zagreb arrived with the dawn. There was no pretense that he was an elsie: the headless Elsie Council brought him into the Retreat by special dispensation, prepared to try anything that might result in the capture of the Avenger and Sara Blair.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He found Smith on the veranda overlooking the lake. Jo was having a swim before breakfast.

"If you enjoy seeing elsies worried, Smith," Zagreb said grimly, "you're going to have a ball. Nothing you've seen so far can compare with what you'll see today."

"How's that, sir?"

"The Avenger has sent his first real demand to the newspapers. The news should be breaking all over the Retreat about now. He wants fifty million. Not from any particular elsie, but from elsies in general. Unless the Elsie Council agrees within twenty-four hours, elsies inside and outside the Retreat are not merely going to be slashed. They're going to die, like Henry Fax."

Smith said nothing. Jo, curious, swam to the landing-stage below the veranda and climbed out. The early morning sun caught the droplets on her skin and turned them into gold. As she stood slim and erect by the rail, hearing the news from Zagreb, two things fought for Smith's whole attention: the temptation to get rid of Zagreb somehow, anyhow, and carry Jo, willing or unwilling, inside the chalet; and the sudden realization that Jo's present appearance, entirely typical of girl elsies, was highly significant.

Duty won. "Sir," he said, "I think I can tell you who Sara Blair is."

"You've found something out?" said Zagreb.

"No. I just thought of something, that's all."

Jo was watching him steadily, patiently.

"Something I don't know?" Zagreb demanded. "Something you've noticed since coming to the Retreat?"

"No, sir. Nothing you don't know. It was you who told me that I'd only manage to pass as an elsie among elsies if I took the identity of a known, recent, genuine elsie."

"Oh." Zagreb was disappointed. "If that's all . . . my dear Smith, naturally we've checked that angle. It leads nowhere."

"It was you, too, who made me admit that elsies are generally competent and efficient."

"Well?"

"If you recall what we know of the Avenger and of Sara Blair, you'll agree that everything the woman has done has been effective and the man has made a botch of the one thing he's tried. It's also important that at a time when nearly every elsie is within the Retreat, the woman is inside and the man has to stay outside, sending demands to newspapers."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"All right," Zagreb said. "Assume the woman is an elsie and the man is not. How does that help us?"

"Jo told me that if an elsie was involved in such a scheme, he or she would have to be desperate. Blair is an elsie and desperate; the Avenger, whether desperate or not, is no elsie What does that suggest?"

"Blackmail?"

"Something stronger that that, I think. Love. Blair wants the man to join her as an elsie. But neither of them has a million dols. I guess the Avenger is approaching the top age limit — if he doesn't get the treatment soon it'll be too late."

"Ingenious as all this undoubtedly is, it's nothing more than a series of guesses."

"Until you look at Jo, sir."

Jo had not said a word. She started slightly at this.

"At Miss Seymour?" Zagreb said. "If you're going to tell me that Jo Seymour is Sara Blair, Smith, I really must —"

"No, sir. I said look at her."

They looked at her. Her green swimsuit was slit narrowly from breast to hip, showing the uncanny elsie absence of bulge or sag.

"And the point is," Smith went on, "that there's nothing in the least remarkable about her. Practically all elsies have bodies like that. Tell me, sir — what kind of female elsie would be *desperate* not to lose her man, so desperate that she either instigated or agreed to a scheme like this to enable him to join her as an elsie?"

"Of course!" Jo suddenly exclaimed. "Elsies in general are physically twenty-five or less. An elsie who was older, who wasn't wealthy, wouldn't find men friends among elsies. She'd —"

"Very well," said Zagreb. "I'm convinced. Let's go."

Helen Bauer received them with exactly the right mixture of startled innocence and annoyance at being suspected of such a thing.

While Zagreb and Jo talked to her, however, Smith was looking around. It was no use looking for the knife, which could be lying openly among the rest of the cutlery. But Helen Bauer's chalet was tiny and bare; there were not many places where masks and the other materials necessary for successful disguise could be hidden.

He found them under the boards of the bedroom.

"It's no use, Miss Bauer," Zagreb said.

"You can't prove anything," she said. "I have a mask that looks like the one the woman Sara Blair used. That's all."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It's by no means all," Zagreb said grimly. "You amateur criminals haven't a chance once we begin to suspect you. Analysis of your clothes, the dust in your hair, the patina of your skin and a host of other things will show us where you've been recently and what you've done. If the knife you used is still here, we'll match it with Fax's injuries and that in itself will convict you. We'll have your voice, modified by a throat resonator, checked against the Slessinger demand recording."

The woman saw she was beaten. She shrugged. "You'll never find out who worked with me," she said.

"I think we will. Miss Seymour, will you step outside for a moment?"

Jo hesitated, then turned and went out.

"Smith," Zagreb said. "You hate elsies. You think they're the scum of the earth."

Smith said nothing.

"Here's an elsie who won't tell us the name of the man she worked with. She likes playing with knives. Have you a pocket knife, Smith?"

"You're not scaring me," said Helen Bauer contemptuously. She was a hard woman. She had slashed two women and killed a man. "I'll be executed anyway."

"No. You'll be restored to normal metabolism and kept in jail for life."

"Then I haven't much to lose, have I?"

"No," Zagreb admitted. "You've nothing to lose. And yet I'm prepared to wager that you'll do anything to stop Smith inflicting a minor cut on you. That's why your scheme nearly worked, because all elsies are terrified of minor injury. Smith!"

"You can't do it. You're cops aren't you? You can't—"

"Miss Bauer, all Smith is going to do is cut you somewhere. The location of the cut I leave to him. It's such a small offense that—"

"Small offense! The Elsie Council will—"

Zagreb had to laugh. "Miss Bauer, if you think that you of all people can count on the Elsie Council for anything whatever . . . but I'm sure you don't. You were merely making a pleasantry. Well, Smith?"

Smith was no sadist. But he took out his knife and opened it. Before the woman could move he seized her arm. As she watched, fascinated, he drew the blade lightly across her forearm, so lightly that only the top skin was severed and no blood came. Two tiny red droplets showed.

"Stop!" Helen Bauer screamed. She knew she was going to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lose her elsie status anyway, but that was in the future and this was immediate. Something might happen at the trial; somehow she might get off.

She couldn't watch herself losing immortality.

"I'll tell you," she said.

"You're wrong, Smith," Zagreb said gently. "It's a great honor to be invited to meet the Elsie Council. Personally I wouldn't miss it for worlds."

"I'm going to tell them," Smith said, as they waited for the double doors to open, "that I did my duty."

"But of course. By the way, do you know who the new Elsie Council president is?"

"No. Should I?"

The doors opened and they found themselves at one end of a long table at which twelve ordinary-looking men and women sat.

Smith saw only one face — that of Jo. She sat at the head of the table, smiling.

"Please sit down," she said. "Gentlemen, we asked you here to thank you. Of course you only did what you had to do in convicting Robert Gilbert and Helen Bauer. But we're grateful to you both, particularly to Sar Smith."

"When the Elsie Council has reason to be grateful to anyone, the usual thing is to offer them the elsie treatment if they wish it. Unfortunately, Cap Zagreb, it's unlikely in your case that the treatment would be successful."

"I'm well aware of that," Zagreb sighed. "Before you embarrass me, Miss Seymour, let me make it clear that no reward of any kind is necessary or would be acceptable."

Jo nodded. "Then we'll merely thank you, Cap Zagreb. As for Sar Smith, the offer of the elsie treatment is open."

There was a pause, and then Jo went on: "Knowing you as I do, I suggest that you say nothing at all now, but think it over for, say, a week. No one knows better than we do that as well as advantages in being an elsie, there are disadvantages."

"There's no need to think about it," Smith said. He had gone white. He had been genuinely unprepared for this.

And when it was made, when a man had a chance never to age, to project himself into the far future personally instead of vicariously through his children, perhaps by the side of girls like Jo Seymour, there was only one possible answer.

"I accept," he said, and did not turn his head or even blush when, beside him, Zagreb began to laugh uncontrollably.

— J. T. McINTOSH

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HARRY PROTAGONIST BRAIN-DRAINER

BY RICHARD WILSON

Everybody on Earth was with the astronauts on their Mars trip — not only in spirit!

Harry Protagonist, space-age entrepreneur, had been planning the project since the Gus Grissom shot.

The idea was splendidly simple — to let everyone in the United States participate personally when the first Americans landed on Mars.

Harry Protagonist promised something special. Not the vicarious sort of participation people had when they listened to delayed recordings of an astronaut telling about fireflies in space, or watched a mock-up clock ticking off the minutes since blastoff.

Harry promised full audience participation . . . a living link between the space pioneers and those lucky enough to have joined his *You, Astronaut* Club.

What Harry was selling was an intimate connection with the mind of one of the four astronauts participating in Project Long Leap. He offered utter identification with one of the first people to set foot on Mars.

This, historically comparable to the first footfall by Colum-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bus in the western hemisphere, would cost a mere ten bucks — $8.75 on the pre-payment plan to those who sent their checks at once, saving billing fees.

Harry, a former senior editor at *Life* Magazine, knew which executive he had to deal with at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to get exclusive brain rights to the astronauts.

It cost Harry a mere $50 million, payable on the launching of the four-man spaceship.

The four Marsbound astronauts were George Lincoln, John F. Adams, Dwight D. Roosevelt and Thomas Alva Wright.

By an amazing coincidence, ethnicswise, the four were a Protestant, a Catholic, a Jew and a Moslem who was also a Negro.

Thus they were 100% true-blue Americans.

Each had an I.Q. no lower than 130 and no higher than 146 (the NASA director's I.Q. was 147).

Each of the astronauts knew he might never return, but each also knew that if he did he would be a hero — and a rich hero. His many pre-launch contracts, with Harry Protagonist and others, guaranteed him a fortune before his 30th birthday.

Thus, for a fee of $10,000 payable on his return to Earth, each astronaut let himself be fitted with a sensor which connected his thoughts not only to NASA's electronic ear but also to Harry Protagonist's giant empathy installation at the *You, Astronaut* Club.

Virtually all Americans were hooked up to the Marsbound hero astronauts.

This was because Harry Protagonist had generously okayed a special rate of $1 per kid for schools, so that every child in every school that had electricity was connected, brainwise, to the Intrepid Four.

Everybody got his choice of an astronaut, even the dollar-apiece kids.

This meant that when he paid his buck or his ten bucks he picked one of the four astronauts for his very own to share history with.

Harry Protagonist guaranteed everybody that what the astronaut saw, felt and thought, he would see, feel and think, from liftoff on Earth to landfall on Mars.

You can see what's coming, can't you?

I will tell you anyway; it will appeal to your sense of irony.

What happened was that the Martians pranged the astronauts as they were coming in for a landing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They (the Martians) got them (the astronauts) in their sights and clobbered them like sitting ducks.

It was too bad but, as the British would put it (and later did), there it was.

Nobody had figured on there being Martians, let alone bad Martians.

In the ordinary course of things we'd have lost only four astronauts.

But because of Harry Protagonist's grand scheme, one hundred and seventy-four million, three hundred and sixty-two thousand, five hundred and eighty-nine people who had been hooked up, mindwise, to the four astronauts also perished.

It was a real brain drain.

Fortunately for Harry Protagonist, all of the 170 million-odd had paid in advance; and he himself, instinctively distrustful of his own schemes, hadn't been hooked up to any of the astronauts.

He became a rather sad and lonely billionaire — but not for long.

The overpopulated British, attracted by the American vacuum, came down by way of Canada to take over the country and applied their confiscatory taxes to the Queen's new subject, Harry Protagonist.

The British explained that they had acted in the highest tradition of the Anglo-American Alliance and from the purest motive possible, to keep the Russians out.

There wasn't anything anybody was able to do about it; I mean there it was.

— RICHARD WILSON

Beginning this month in *If* —

STARCHILD

by Jack Williamson
and Frederik Pohl

This and stories by Keith Laumer, Wilson Tucker and other favorite science-fiction writers in the January *If* . . . get your copy today!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FIN'S FUNERAL

BY DONALD H. MENZEL

∞

Fin Nolan was undoubtedly dead. But what was it that was living on — eternally?

∞

I returned late that afternoon to find the phone ringing imperatively. I answered it, dashed out again, hailed a passing taxi and settled back to scan the paper I had picked up on the way. There was the story on page one, a few lines concerning my closest friend and former teacher:

Late News Bulletin

Los Angeles, April 25. Frederick I. "Fin" Nolan, the world-famous scientist, died here today as a result of a heart attack at the age of 68. His studies of space and time, extensions of Einstein's theories, won him international recognition as a mathematical physicist. During World War II he made significant contributions to both the chemical and physical aspects of the famed Manhattan Project which produced the first atomic bomb.

Nolan had been in practical retirement for several years, because of poor health. His nearest living relative is a niece, Harriet E. Nolan, of Santa Monica.

I was shocked, of course — shocked but not surprised. After his first heart attack two years ago, Fin should have taken it easier. If anything, he had accelerated his pace, working long hours in his private laboratory. As a former student, I was Fin's closest friend and confidant. He tried out his theories on me and we worked as a team in the experimental laboratory, mixing chemicals, assembling electronic devices, and so on. Exciting, fascinating!

Most people assumed that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fin's nickname derived from his initials. I knew of two more compelling reasons. He had not acquired the "handle" until college where his exceptional talent for science and mathematics became evident. The concept of infinity, especially from the standpoint of space and time, fascinated him. He was always so ready to discuss his favorite topic that his associates took to calling him "Infinity," which time and familiarity shortened to "Fin."

And Fin Nolan's right cheek bore a livid birthmark in the shape of a figure eight lying on its side: the mathematician's symbol for infinity. I have said "birthmark," but I remember Fin's telling me that the disfiguring symbol had not appeared until he was about two years old. He was rather proud of it. To him it was more a trademark than a birthmark.

Fin Nolan was an out-and-out-genius. His knowledge in the sciences — physics, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry — was prodigious. He possessed, in addition, an inventive streak, which enabled him to turn nature's laws to practical use. He was something of an engineer and royalties from several of his inventions had made him wealthy. Perhaps the most successful of these was a highly accurate atomic wristwatch, whose luminous dial provided motive power for the hands.

His greatest interest — call it a hobby if you will — was in the geometry of the universe: the fundamental meaning of space and time. On these subjects he read everything that came to hand, from Einstein to Ray Bradbury. Rockets, missiles, satellites, space travel interested him equally.

My mind flashed back to a recent conversation. "You know, Dave," Fin had said, "Einstein's theory of relativity is based on a hypothesis that time is a fourth dimension. Time, therefore, should be on a par with space in the universe. And yet there is a singular difference, arising from the fact that space has three dimensions, where time has only one. You can turn an object upside down in space but you can't reverse it in time. In outer space there is no unique direction, such as up or down. But there is in time. Time is always a one-way stretch, a single track leading forward into the future or backward into the past. But, in the purely geometric sense, how can you say which direction of time is the past and which the future?"

"Surely that's no problem," I argued. "I always associate time

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with motion — rotation of the earth or revolution of the planets around the sun."

"That's exactly what I mean, Dave." Fin said. "Just suppose that you are a man from some planet revolving around the star Sirius and that you've never seen the solar system. Now, if I were to present you with a motion-picture film showing the planets whirling around the sun, you'd have no way of figuring out how to put it into the projector. The film would make just as much sense backwards as forwards. None of the basic laws of physics and astronomy would be changed. So that you, as a Sirian, couldn't tell from the film which is the past and which the future."

"But," I argued, "suppose the film should show meteors plunging into the earth's atmosphere and burning up. Surely I could tell then. A backwards film, showing a train of fire shooting out into space and condensing into a solid meteor, would make no sense at all."

"I agree, of course," Fin admitted. "The only processes indicating the direction of what Eddington once termed 'Time's Arrow' are those associated with heat or friction. A bucket of hot water, in cooler surroundings, always cools down. It never gets hotter of its own accord.

"But what I really meant was that time should be associated with the universe itself — not based upon the microscopic processes that govern friction and heat. Otherwise time would be very different from space, which exists independently of the matter it contains.

"Or does it?" Fin mused aloud. "You're familiar of course with the theory known as Continuous Creation of Matter — invented by Gold, Hoyle and Bondi?"

I nodded agreement, and Fin continued. "The expanding universe is a fact — not a theory. It is well established by observation. Gold and his colleagues argue that, as space expands, matter must continually and automatically be created in it, so that the universe won't thin out.

"Now let me ask you a simple question. Why does a balloon expand?"

"It expands because you blow into it," I answered.

"Exactly! Gold, Hoyle and Bondi are right except that they have their theory hindside to. They've confused cause and effect. I think that the universe is expanding because matter is being created within it. And this new matter pushes out the boundaries of space with a speed approaching that of light.

"It seems to me that the reasoning of Gold and company is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a modern version of the discredited idea of the ancients that nature abhors a vacuum — which of course is absolute nonsense. I don't see how a vacuum could suck matter into existence. However, a positive pressure from the new atoms could push out the boundaries of space.

"My idea now clearly defines the progression of time. Time advances as the universe expands. More than that! I conclude that one could in some way cause matter to disappear 'uncreated' — we could reverse time."

"That doesn't sound reasonable to me," I objected. "Surely there's no way of turning time backward."

"Maybe not in the Universe as a whole," Fin agreed. "But if we could uncreate matter in a limited region, time would reverse there perhaps balanced by excess creation of matter in the regions immediately surrounding, where time would progress more rapidly than elsewhere in the universe."

"Isn't the atomic bomb uncreation of matter?" I asked.

"Certainly not! In the bomb, matter is merely transformed into energy. The total mass is identical since matter and energy are equivalent to one another.

"This concept of mine suggests that matter breeds matter, so to speak. I visualize that the whole universe — some ten billion years ago — consisted of only one or, more probably, two atoms contained in a tiny sphere about the size of a toy balloon. Suddenly matter began to appear inside and the balloon started its expansion which has gone on steadily ever since. The entire universe is the offspring of those two original atoms."

"The original Atom and Eve?" I queried. Fin's pained face indicated his disapproval of my occasional compulsion to turn the apt pun. So I continued on a more scientific plane.

"Do you mean that the sun and the earth are gradually growing bigger because of atoms created in them?" I asked.

"There are two opposite schools of thought," he replied. "Gold thinks that the new matter is spread uniformly through all of space. And then, to get it back into the stars where it could serve as a fuel and prolong their lives, he imagines that the stars capture it, the matter raining down to the surface. On this hypothesis not much matter forms in any one place. As Hoyle expresses it, in a single year only one atom is created in a volume about the size of a large skyscraper.

"I've already expressed my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

view. Matter breeds matter. I think that the creation occurs wherever matter is already dense. So that everything is actually putting on weight."

"How much?" I asked. "Can I blame my increasing avoirdupois on this?"

"Hardly," Fin replied. "The earth is gaining about a billion atoms per cubic inch every second."

"Sounds like a lot to me," I continued.

"You've forgotten how light atoms actually are. At that rate it would take you about a million years to put on a single pound. This means that no test known to man could possibly decide between these two extremes, whether the created matter is uniformly distributed through space or concentrated in the denser regions like stars and planets."

Several months later Fin indicated to me that he had not considered our talk mere fancy. We were in his laboratory, inspecting one of his latest experiments, employing equipment that looked like a miniature electric power station: wires, insulators, transistors, surrounding a large metal tube about three feet on each side.

"Solid uranium," he said, "except for a small hollow about six inches across at its center."

"Pure uranium 238?" I asked, somewhat awed by the amount of the metal and its great value.

"Obviously," Fin replied. "This mass is far above the critical mass for U-235. Only a fraction of that amount of U-235 and we would be mere atoms floating in the mushroom cloud of an after-explosion!"

"But U-238 has a very low level of radioactivity," I observed. "Why not use a cyclotron or an atomic pile?"

"I'm using this uranium because of its high density, not as a source of radioactivity," he explained quietly. "Since this is one of the dense elements, creation of matter within this mass will be greater than any other place on earth, if my theory is correct."

The simple statement was startling in its implications.

"The central chamber contains coils of electrons capable of producing the most powerful electromagnetic fields in the world," Fin had said. "Now watch."

He pressed a switch and a motor generator began to whine. The laboratory lights dimmed. Without warning, the tubes began to glow. A sudden crack, like the sound of a thousand jet planes simultaneously breaking the sound barrier, almost broke my eardrums. Then silence, as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the lights returned to normal brilliance.

"Considerable hydrogen fusion in the chamber," Fin explained. "Something like a miniature H-bomb. But still not enough for a sustained reaction. However, that isn't the real reason behind this experiment."

Opening a door in the cube, he withdrew a small filmholder. We developed it together in the darkroom. A few minutes later we were studying the result.

"This is a spectrogram of hydrogen, excited in the electromagnetic field of the chamber. Don't pay any attention to the broader line at the center. That's caused by ordinary Stark or Zeeman effects. But look at the peculiar appearance at the edges."

I could see the normal straight line curled like hooks. "Why," I gasped, "the wavelengths are all shifted. The beta line is orange-yellow instead of blue-green. All the lines are shifted to the left!"

"Yes," Fin agreed. "The red shift, like that shown in light from nebulae in distant parts of the universe where time proceeds more slowly than it does here. Dave, I feel that I'm on the verge of the greatest discovery of my life. In these intense electromagnetic fields I am slowing time down by inhibiting the creation of matter!"

That conversation took place three months ago, and I had not seen Fin since. Consolidated had sent me to Cape Kennedy to help study some problems of their new intercontinental ballistic missile.

And now I should never know the answer.

The arrival of the taxi at the E and C Building recalled my mind from the past. I went up to the office of Mr. Dines, Fin's personal lawyer. Mr. Dines himself greeted me. "We've been trying to reach you all afternoon, Mr. Desmond," he said. "Sorry to bring you such bad news. I know how close you were to Mr. Nolan. But this matter is very urgent."

He ushered me into his office.

"I assume you know Miss Harriet Nolan," he remarked, inclining his head toward the thin woman who wore a grayish bun at the nape of her neck.

Of course I knew Harriet, the unmarried daughter of Fin's brother. Funny how I always thought of her as old, though she was only 40 or so. Our paths had crossed many times, but I took no pleasure from recalling those meetings. Harriet approved neither of me nor of her Uncle Fin — or, rather, her Uncle Frederick, for she had taken an aversion to his nickname.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She gave me a cold, tight-lipped smile that acknowledged my presence and said, with obvious irritation, "Where have you been, David? We've been waiting more than five hours!"

"Sorry," I apologized. "But I had no way of knowing. Spent the afternoon in conference. Confidential work. That's all I can say, of course. My sincere condolences about Fin."

"Now that Uncle Frederick is gone," she remonstrated, "I hope you will drop that horrible nickname. Why do parents give their children names whose initials can be so easily corrupted!"

Harriet's middle name was Edna, I knew. Perhaps her dislike of "Fin" stemmed from fear that people might dub her "Hen", as indeed some of us did, behind her back.

Mr. Dines cleared his throat and, indicating a chair for me, broke up our exchange. "This shouldn't take long," he said. "First the will and then certain instructions about the funeral." He unfolded a paper and read. The will was simple enough.

I, Frederick I. Nolan, being of sound and disposing mind, declare this to be my last will and testament, revoking all previous wills made by me.

I direct that my funeral expenses and all debts be paid promptly.

To my niece, Harriet E. Nolan, of Santa Monica, California, I bequeath the sum of $25,000.

The residue of my estate, I give, devise, and bequeath to my esteemed friend and associate, David Desmond.

I nominate David Desmond to be the executor of this my will to serve without bond and with full authority to sell or otherwise dispose of my property as he may desire. A confidential letter, attached hereto, and addressed to David Desmond, gives further directions concerning my funeral and burial.

As the attorney concluded, an explosive gasp called my attention to Harriet. Her cheeks were pink and her pursed lips blue with anger. "Of all the nerve!" she sputtered. "It's an outright insult! I knew his mind was failing these last few years. Of course I'll break the will."

"The will is five years old and properly signed and witnessed," Dines advised.

"Let's see what's in the letter then," Harriet interjected. "That might clear up the matter."

"The letter's addressed to David Desmond," Dines observed pointedly. Speaking directly to me, he advised, "You have no obligation whatever to disclose its contents to anyone. Even I don't know its provisions."

"Oh, go ahead and read it," I conceded. "After all, Harriet is his closest relative and will have to know about the funeral arrangements."

The lawyer inspected the red wax seal, slit the envelope, and unfolded the contents.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Perhaps I should tell you," he said, "that Mr. Nolan replaced an earlier letter with this new one just last week." He then went on to read.

Dear Dave:

I have full confidence that you will carry out my wishes to the letter, however bizarre some of them may seem to you.

My funeral is to be private, attended only by yourself and Harriet, should she wish to come. I made the basic arrangements long ago.

The casket, one that I designed personally, is in storage at Lane's Mortuary. You will insist that no one is to make any adjustments whatever of the various dials on the exterior.

There are to be no formal services. The casket containing my body should be placed in the family burial vault at Evergreen Cemetery.

On the side of the casket you will find a large silver button. When the casket is finally set in place, you are to push that button and then leave immediately.

The lawyer turned the page and hesitated. "Miss Nolan," he said, "I'm afraid the next paragraph wasn't intended for you. I think that we'd all be happier if we stopped right here."

"Not at all!" Harriet exclaimed. "I've got to know the rest, now."

"Okay, then. But remember I warned you." He hurried on, reading rapidly until the end.

You probably will have some trouble with Hen, who has never liked either of us. She hasn't the slightest appreciation of science. So be careful in your dealings with her. I rely entirely on your judgment should any unexpected emergency arise.

Sincerely yours,
Fin

The explosion next to me came within a few tons TNT of equaling that of the bomb at Hiroshima.

"Of all the insults! Of all the idiots! First of all a mere $25,000 from an estate that must be worth at least a million! And now this —" She fumed on. Had it been out of doors, I'm sure that a mushroom cloud would have been clearly visible overhead.

The attorney quickly intervened. "Probably between $800,000 and $900,000, but subject to heavy taxes before distribution." He coughed and spoke apologetically to me. "This is really your responsibility, I know. However, you can't keep figures like that under cover for long."

"But," I asked Harriet, "I understood that you were quite wealthy in your own right? After all, your mother . . ."

"That isn't it," she returned. "Frankly, I feel I have as much right as you do to Uncle Frederick's estate. Especially since his latest actions have been so peculiar."

I bristled. "Peculiar? In my entire life I have never thought Fin peculiar in any respect."

She overlooked my use of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nickname. "Peculiar is right! Always taking about explosions. Explosions in time and space!"

I suppose that some of Fin's explanations would have been unintelligible to a non-scientist. And I could recall his exact words. "Explosions," he had said, "are events primarily of space rather than of time. An atomic bomb detonates. The explosion develops into a shock wave that has a devastating effect on space, but none at all upon time. But—you get a strong enough force field and I think you might change time as well as space."

That discussion, which Harriet also had heard, antedated ours about time and expanding universe. I suppose it would have been frightening to a layman—and a woman at that.

And that is how I, on a rainy April afternoon, came to be in a darkened vault in Evergreen Cemetery. Dust-covered stone slabs concealed several coffins. A few urns, standing in niches on the walls, undoubtedly contained the ashes of other relatives.

By comparison, Fin's casket, even in the gray light, was startling to behold. It had the appearance of burnished silver, though I didn't know what the metal was. It was certainly not uranium, though I thought how singularly appropriate that metal would have been. Most startling of all were several dials on the side, which gave to it the appearance of a huge radio set. I recalled Fin's admonition about the dials and had carefully warned the Mortuary about this detail. And I readily recognized the silver button ready for me to push.

The casket was open, as I had directed. I took a last look at Fin. He looked very natural, even to the infinity-symbol mark on his cheek.

Numerous floral tributes had arrived despite the printed request, "Please omit flowers." I felt sure that Fin himself would have approved my arrangement of them to form the doubled circle of infinity.

The screeching of a rusty hinge interrupted my thoughts, and a shadow fell on the casket. I turned to face Harriet.

"I decided to come after all," she announced, stepping toward Fin and allowing her hands to rest lightly on the casket. "Poor Uncle Frederick. What nonsense about these dials!" Suddenly, before I could intervene, she gave one of them a vicious turn.

"Stop!" I cried—too late. "You mustn't move them!" I tried to reset the dial, but the resetting was only approximate of course. In accord with the directions I pushed down the lid, which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

clicked into place. I then pressed the silver button, and stepped back. "We must leave immediately," I advised, walking rapidly toward the door of the vault.

A low humming noise, like the buzzing of a swarm of bees, came from the casket. The sound grew louder until it seemed a pulsing roar. By this time I was frightened. "Hurry!" I yelled to Harriet. But it was already too late. A greenish glow, emanating from the casket, suffused the scene, casting weird reddish shadows against the wall. Then came a deafening explosion. The blast threw me violently to the floor and I blacked out from the concussion.

When I recovered my senses, darkness had come. I stumbled to my feet, groped in my pocket for a flashlight and pushed the button. The beam revealed the casket twisted and torn open—and mysteriously empty.

All this I saw in a glance as I knelt over Harriet. She was alive though her pulse was feeble and fluttering. But I had the greatest shock when I turned the light on her face. Her cheeks were shrunken and wrinkled, her hair —still in a prissy bun—white. Were it not for the identifying dress she wore, I would never have recognized this obviously aged creature as Harriet.

In semi-panic I lifted her over my shoulder and stumbled toward the door. Stumbled indeed! In the darkness my foot struck a soft object. A bundle of clothes, I thought, until a piercing cry from it made me realize that the bundle contained s o m e t h i n g alive.

Quickly I carried Harriet to my parked car, dropped her on the rear seat and ran back breathlessly to the tomb. The "bundle" proved to contain a child, about a year old as nearly as I could judge. I took the baby to the car and drove to the gate, which a suspicious watchman finally opened. From there I dashed to the hospital.

Nearly a year has elapsed since then. During this interval, my conviction has grown that the casket was a time machine, operating on principle of uncreating matter. Fin had undoubtedly preset dials with the intention of bringing himself back to the prime of his life.

But Harriet's contemptuous turning of the dial had upset the delicate adjustment. Outside the casket time had jumped ahead, causing Harriet to age some thirty years in the same time transition whose greater intensity and reversed sign within the casket and had carried Fin sixty-seven years into the past.

Harriet survived. The doctors

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

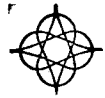
attributed her sudden aging to some unusual and unknown disease—an explanation which she herself accepted. She was, after all, somewhat hazy about the passage of time, though by no means senile. She remembered Fin's death but had no recollection of what had happened.

She swallowed her pride enough to solicit my help in her business affairs—probably because she had no one else to turn to. But she resented the child, whom I had managed to adopt and had given the name of Frederick I. Nolan Desmond. The records indicate that he was a doorstep baby but the location of the doorstep that I found him on is not mentioned.

At our last meeting, Hen voiced her feelings. "Why do you insist on calling that child Fin? You know how I dislike that nickname." And then she continued as if talking to herself, "He certainly does resemble Uncle Frederick's baby pictures." She carefully scrutinized the boy who was adeptly arranging blocks on the carpet. Suddenly she gave a choking cry. Pointing at little Fin, she exclaimed, "I never saw that before!"

I looked myself. There on the child's right cheek I saw for the first time the shadowy markings of a figure eight lying on its side, the mathematician's symbol for infinity.

— DONALD H. MENZEL



STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Act of October 23, 1962; Section 4369, Title 39, United States Code.) 1. Date of filing, Oct. 1, 1964. 2. Title of publication, GALAXY MAGAZINE. 3. Frequency of issue, bi-monthly. 4. Location of known office of publication, 421 Hudson Street, New York, N.Y., 10014. 5. Location of the headquarters or general business office of the publishers (not printers), 421 Hudson Street, New York, N.Y., 10014. Name and addresses of publisher, editor and managing editor; Publisher Sol Cohen; 421 Hudson Street, New York, N.Y., 10014, Editor Frederik Pohl, 421 Hudson Street, New York, N.Y., 10014, Managing editor none. 7. Owner: Galaxy Publishing Corp., 421 Hudson Street, New York, N.Y., 10014, Robert M. Guinn (sole stockholder) 421 Hudson Street, New York, N.Y., 10014. 8. Known bondholders, mortgages, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortages or securities: none. 9. Paragraphs 7 and 8 include in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, also the statements in two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. Names and addresses of individuals who are stockholders of a corporation which itself is a stockholder or holder of bonds, mortgages or other securities of the publishing corporation have been included in paragraphs 7 and 8 when the interests of such individuals are equivalent to 1 percent or more of the total amount of stocks or securities of the publishing corporation. 10. A. Total no. copies printed (net press run): average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 111,950. single issue nearest to filing date: 111,700. B. Paid circulation. 1. To term subscribers by mail carrier delivery or by other means: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 6,800, single issue nearest to filing date, 7,200. 2. Sales through agents, news dealers, or otherwise: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months 66,736; single issue nearest to filing date: 65,559. C. Free distribution (including samples) by mail, carrier delivery, or by other means: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: none; single issue nearest to filing date: none. Total no. of copies distributed (Sum of lines B1, B2 and C); average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 73,536; single issue nearest to filing date: 72,759. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. Sol Cohen, Publisher.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GALAXY BOOKSHELF

By Algis Budrys

Book reviewing, like writing, editing or driving a nitroglycerine truck, is one of those occupations for which no one feels need of much previous training. So it must also turn out to be one of those occupations as full of ground rules as a Zen tea ceremonial and as little susceptible to perfect success.

In this unsettling view of the matter, the only promising way for the beginner is with the resolve to keep things direct and simple. Accordingly, I here propose to read books, consider what I imagine their authors to have been doing, and discuss what I find interesting in some of them. This is about all I propose to do. If I then turn out to have been doing more, the consequent dismay will be mutual.

The salient thing about Poul Anderson at this moment is that we will all soon realize he has for some time been science fiction's best storyteller. In part, this is because he rarely lets a story go by without conveying a sense that he had to learn something new in order to write it. Learning something new seems to be important to him, and he has now been at it for some fifteen years and over a span of hundreds of stories of various lengths ranging over scores of various kinds.

Doubleday has recently published two collections, *Trader to The Stars* ($3.50) and *Time and Stars* ($3.95), which, while they do not prove these assertions, do suggest them. The former book is a package of three novelettes about Nicholas Van Rijn, the boorish slob who makes unblushing use of his naked power, wallows in the sensual luxuries attendant on his commercial success and thus makes a splendid pulp hero. *Time and Stars* is a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more broad collection of six less clangorous stories, including a beautifully done piece of work like nothing I have seen in the field before.

Van Rijn, endowed with surprising agility in so bulky a man, is loveable and not especially unbelievable in "Hiding Place" and "Territory," the first two stories in *Trader to The Stars*. He was the same in his novel, *The Man Who Counts,* where if you recall he solved one major problem by biting the finger of the alien villain, who was of course totally helpess to withstand the virulent poisons in earthly saliva. Ingenious, ingratiating, and heartwarming though this kind of writing is, it is not going to suit Anderson for long stretches at a time, it never has in the past. And I believe this is why, though "Hiding Place" is a neat puzzle-find the intelligent aliens hiding among their exotic specimens on the captured alien zoo-ship—and "Territory" is the story in which Little Blasphemous Sambo sets the tigers running around his tree so fast they melt themselves into an excellent grade of commercial butter —"The Master Key" is something else again. It is the story of adventure told from arm-chairs at the London military club by the chapfallen young Indian Army officer who fears he has let the side down. The Sir Aubrey Smith part is played by Van Rijn; the flashback battle scenes all star Errol Flynn as the subaltern, with a part written in for Tyrone Power as the Captain From Castile. Van Rijn blusters and starts his way through this audition; the mannerisms that seem possible in a silk-shirted bounder from pillow to purse do not sit well on a bulwark of Empire. For long moments, it is almost as if we were being asked to believe there is some ultimate social good in Van Rijn's personal avarice, a hypothesis true in the abstract but thoroughly undermined here by the hero's broad winks into the wings during the first two acts.

But please note the complaint is with the inconsistency, not with the integrity of the inconsistent piece. For what "The Master Key" is, it is well-enough done. It should not have been shaped for inclusion in the Van Rijn canon, but that is probably a fault of Anderson's being able to write in so many different ways, and being impatient to write them. With that kind of fault, a man needs fewer virtues.

What Anderson needed in *Time and Stars* was an editor. "Eve Times Four," the last piece in the book, is an anticlimactic, out-of-focus inversion of the old *Planet Stories* castaways-of-the-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

starlanes plot. The reverse-hero is ugly, not bumptious, and the superficially levelheaded heroine marooned with him may have been well within her logic but was obviously reasoning straight from her chastity belt all the same. See "Territory," where much the same young lady dances the same dance, but to Van Rijn's tune.

The second least successful story in *Time and Stars* is the lead. "No Truce With Kings," a-flicker with confusing scene-changes, stuffed with narrative compressions and a pale army of sketched characters, should have been tried as a novel (Heinlein's *Sixth Column* in reverse, with less unity but more breadth and depth, and I think better characterization.)

But between these two stories, which serve to provide an exasperating beginning and a flat ending to a four-dollar book, lies more than your money's worth. "Turning Point" is distinguished by its simple charm; a reasonably good what-if idea (What if we do run into aliens who are so likeable and so superior that we will just give up and sit down to applaud?) told with inventiveness for detail and fond characterization, and embodying a likely proposal for solving this possible real problem. This is followed by "Escape From Orbit," which I'll get back to. That is followed by "Epilogue," an unfalteringly sustained creation reminiscent of Don A. Stuart's "Night" crossed with whatever you think is the best Hal Clement story; a story about an Earth so far removed in time and circumstances from our own that the contemporary humans who intrude on it seem monstrous, while the Earth-denizens of that day seem right and proper masters of the house they have built on what Man abandoned. And "The Critique of Impure Reason," while mostly a writer's story, about a future society in which the "little magazine" and the kind of creativity it engenders have taken over publishing, is going to be pleasant reading for science-fiction fans as well.

What may turn out to be highly memorable reading for science-fiction fans is the story I put by above. "Escape From Orbit" is a technique-problem story; the consulting expert is called in to resolve the emergency in space, where three men are trapped and doomed to die unless he can, by exercising technical ingenuity in an office on Earth's surface, so arrange the available materials and data as to bring them safely down.

As we all know, this story when well done affirms many ideals for us. It is done very well

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ıere. But it isn't the real story. What Anderson has really been doing with this structure is brought forward and recapitulated at the end, when the exhausted hero, his dealings with the inflexible Universe satisfactorily concluded, now has to go home and get his kid off to school. The wife who has been phoning him for help with her routine household problems while he was figuring orbits has been so drained by her difficulties that she has slept through the ringing of the alarm clock.

Anderson's technical execution of this story is superb. The most important of the many subtle objectives he set out to reach—and he reached every one I could detect at all—was to make this a profoundly optimistic and ennobling story. He has at least added a new dimension to what seemed to be a completely rounded science-fiction form. I actually believe he has wiped it out and substituted something much more genuinely satisfying and truer to life, but that remains to be seen.

One thing that impresses me most distinctly is that Anderson shows the hero manipulating the supposedly difficult problem by wireless, but having to fend off the wife's problems with stopgaps and finally having to go home in person, not to solve but merely to alleviate one specifi among them. I doubt very much whether this story was intended to be merely about one man and one wife, or cabbages or kings; I believe it was intended to be about whatever energy-sink each of us has; we all have them—so do our wives, kids and kings. I think one thing you could say about this story, if you had only one thing to say, would be that it is about where entropy really lives. And I think it is a piece of literature that could only have been written by a man thoroughly steeped in the traditions of science fiction, and which consequently could not possibly be fully understood by the editors or readers of "mainstream" anthologies of noteworthy contemporary writing, which is one of the places where this piece of work otherwise belongs.

Their loss is a consequence of our gain, and much comfort may that give a man whose tireless polishing of his talents has put him in that paradox. Whether this story is the clear and outstanding contribution to the field that I presently believe it to be, I may have occasion to report at some time when my blood has cooled and my omniscience is not impaired by admiration. I do believe that "Escape From Orbit" creates a doubt that there have been very many genuinely

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

realistic science-fiction stories. It certainly makes a mockery of the kind of realism based on conscientiously counting the number of johns aboard the spaceship.

Keith Laumer's *The Great Time Machine Hoax* (Simon & Schuster, $3.95) is billed as a picaresque jape about Chester W. Chester IV, swept back and perhaps forth through time by his idiosyncratic great-grandfather's equally eccentric, omnipotent computer. Various adventures are recorded, and finally Chester, a far better man when he started out, rescues two time-stranded companions — one of them a synthetic naked girl who turns real just in time — and the book ends.

Actually, Laumer has been playing a little joke on Simon & Schuster. Buried in the middle of this volume is a long episode of straight adventure-with-lectures in which Chester is not only transformed from Jack Oakie to Jack Armstrong but encounters just the right people to lecture and be lectured at. Most of them are from the cast of *Atlas Shrugged*. But the attractiveness of the doctrines reflected lies between Laumer and anyone with $3.95 to spend on a book. What I found interesting is that Laumer can do a number of things well; be funny, be straightforward, be suspenseful, be technical (about gliders and other simple machinery, not about time machines, though I grant you he designed it), be convincing even when he carps. My objection is that he has now done all of them, has expended three or four widely different divergent plots and situations besides, and doesn't have even one whole book to show for it.

One of the two things most people remember about John Taine is that he was a writer of rococco adventure (*Before The Dawn, The Greatest Adventure*) as distinguished from, say, H. G. Wells the writer of sociological—and thus modern—science fiction. He is usually also known to have been Eric Temple Bell, once professor of mathematics somewhere. Even his publishers these days (in this case, Dover, which also publishes Wells as well as *David Harum*) tend to present his books as nostalgia—pleasantly archaic "entertainments" spun by the idling brain of a narrowly specialized post-Victorian academician and illustrated by Frank R. Paul.

This is as serious an error, because equally devious, as would be the notion that Isaac Asimov is a biochemist and science reporter whereas Ray Bradbury is a writer. There are some very

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hard human questions raised by such Taine novels as *The Time Stream*. (I also suggest that *Seeds of Life* is the more searching of two roughly similar novels of identity, the other being *The Invisible Man*.)

Taine has a habit of telling things out of chronological order and starting slowly in any case. But he repays the slight necessary effort. Try the present Dover omnibus (*Three Science Fiction Novels by John Taine*, Dover Publications, $2.00, large-size paperback) containing *The Time Stream*, *The Greatest Adventure*, and *The Purple Sapphire*. My point is not that Taine will now impress you most as a social philosopher neglected in the shade of his distinguished English contemporary; my point is that these supposed entertainments of an outmoded scientifiction will impress you with how cogent they are, while entertaining you.

The Reefs of Space, by Frederik Pohl and Jack Williamson (Ballantine Books), is the first Pohl-Williamson collaboration for the adult science fiction market. It is not like a Jack Williamson novel, not like a Frederik Pohl novel, and not like a Pohl-Kornbluth novel; accordingly, it has passed the first test of this collaboration, and probably answered your first question.

It is full of inventions. Among them is the premise that the continuous creation of hydrogen in empty space is paralleled by the continuous creation of life; that this life takes the form of matter-converting organisms roughly analogous to coral, who have built up great "reefs" of crystallized heavy elements in space which may, in fact, be the mechanism by which planets, and planetary life, came into being. These developments of elaborated ideas on the original Hoyle hypothesis are very impressive to watch; when translated into mental pictures of great self-luminescent fairylands flashing and sailing in the wilderness of interstellar night, they become beautiful.

The action plot is reminiscent of most novels done according to what I think of as collaborative method; the hero is at odds with his social organization (in this case a machine-administered Plan of Man) against his own best wishes. He wants little more than to be accepted by the Plan as a willing, useful citizen (in this case, a physicist) but he unwittingly has done something and knows something to which the Plan objects, though he cannot get it to specify what that might be. In time, after a series of conflicts, confrontations, escapes and perils, he learns the answers and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

participates in activities which drastically alter society so that he can fit into it.

But there are things going on here which quite rare in science fiction nowadays and completely overshadow the plot in any appraisal of this book's individuality. Its most significant feature is the constant generation of science-fiction ideas and science-fiction characters, for which the hero's troubles are never much more than a vehicle.

The reefs are inhabited not only by the fusorians, who built them by fusing hydrogen into heavier elements, but by beautiful, reasonably intelligent golden spacelings, much like mute porpoises. Their natural enemies are the vicious pyropods, organically rocket-driven animals something like squid. And the reefs, of which the nearest is far beyond Pluto, have become the refuge of various dissidents from the Plan. Moreover, the spacelings have an inertialess (the book's word is "jetless") organic drive, which as everyone knows is impossible under the Third Law of Motion, and unlikely even in porpoises, but which nevertheless enables the spacelings to swim anywhere they please, taking their own atmosphere with them.

You can see the plot-threads in there, and sure enough the hero, who has been assigned the task of developing a jetless drive for the Plan, and accused of knowing all about it but refusing to cough it up, ends his tale on a reef, where all is made right in the end, which comes suddenly and flatly.

What I did not see in there was that the writers would come up with a perfectly reasonable-sounding basis not only for the spacelings' inertialessness but for Hoyle's continuous-creation hypothesis, which as we all know is against common sense, a harder taskmaster than Newton ever was.

The plot, as I say, ends anticlimatically. Furthermore, several characters are thrown away after considerable development, among them a chap named Oporto and a Godot-figure named Ron Donderevo. There are other deficiencies of detail. But there are no deficiencies in the things that distinguish a science-fiction story from all other stories; there is the melding of actual science with an author's scientific counter-hypothesis that amplifies and romanticizes it, and there is the reader's growing sense of grasping something grand . . . the sense of wonder, if you will. This is not the best example of a novel you will see in the field this year, but it's a most rewarding piece of science fiction.

—ALGIS BUDRYS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PLANET OF FORGETTING

BY JAMES H. SCHMITZ

ILLUSTRATED BY GAUGHAN

On this world men could not live, for here you forgot everything — even forgot you were forgetting!

I

At best, Major Wade Colgrave decided, giving his mud-caked boot tips a brooding scowl, amnesia would be an annoying experience. But to find oneself, as he had just done, sitting on the rocky hillside of an unfamiliar world which showed no sign of human habitation, with one's think-tank seemingly in good general working order but with no idea of how one had got there, was more than annoying. It could be fatal.

The immediate situation didn't look too dangerous. He might

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have picked up some appalling local disease which would presently manifest itself, but it wasn't likely. A foreign-duty agent of Earth's military intelligence was immunized early in his career against almost every possible form of infection.

Otherwise, there was a variety of strange lifeforms in sight, each going about its business. Some looked big enough to make a meal of a human being and might, if they noticed him. But the gun on Colgrave's hip should be adequate to knock such ideas out of predators who came too close.

He'd checked the gun over automatically on discovering a few minutes before that he had one. It was a standard military type, manufactured by upward of a dozen Terran colonies and ex-colonies. There were no markings to indicate its origin; but more important at the moment was the fact that the ammocounter indicated that it contained a full charge.

What could have happened to get him into this position?

The amnesia, however he'd acquired it, took a peculiar form. He had no questions about his identity. He knew who he was. Further, up to a point . . . in fact, practically up to a specific second of his life . . . his memory seemed normal. He'd been on Earth, had been told to report at once to the office of Jerry Redman, his immediate superior. And he was walking along a hall on the eighteenth floor of the headquarters building, not more than thirty feet from the door of Redman's office, when his memory simply stopped. He couldn't recall a thing between that moment and the one when he'd found himself sitting there.

Presumably Redman had prepared a new assignment for him: and presumably he'd been briefed on it and set off. If he could extend his memory even thirty minutes beyond the instant of approaching the door, he might have a whole fistful of clues to what had gone on during the interval. But not a thing would come to mind. It wasn't a matter of many years being wiped out; if he'd aged at all, he couldn't detect it. Some months, however, might easily have vanished, or even as much as two or three years . . .

Had somebody given him a partially effective memory wipeout and left him marooned here? Not at all likely. A rather large number of people unquestionably would be glad to see Intelligence deprived of his talents, but they wouldn't resort to such roundabout methods. A bullet through his head, and the job would have been done.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The thought that he'd been on a spaceship which cracked up in attempting a landing on this planet, knocking him out in the process, seemed more probable. He might have been the only survivor and staggered away from the wreck, his wits somewhat scrambled. If that was it, it had happened very recently.

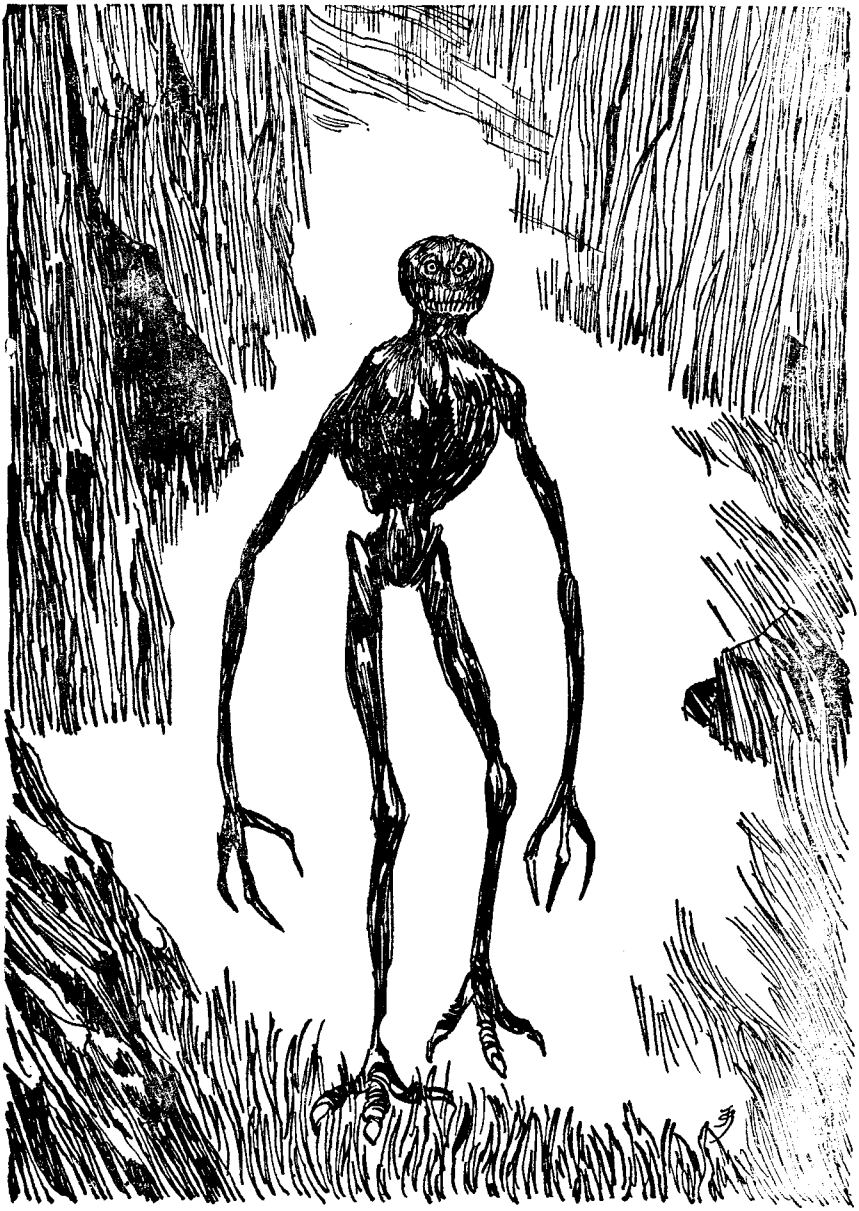
He was thirsty, hungry, dirty, and needed a shave. But neither he nor his clothing suggested he had been an addled castaway on a wild planet for any significant length of time. The clothes were stained with mud and vegetable matter but in good general condition. He might have stumbled into a mud hole in the swamps which began at the foot of the hills below him and stretched away to the right, then climbed up here and sat down until he dried off. There was, in fact, a blurred impression that he'd been sitting in this spot an hour or so, blinking foggily at the landscape, before he suddenly grew aware of himself and his surroundings.

Colgrave's gaze shifted slowly about the panorama before him, searching for the glitter of a downed ship or any signs of human activity. There was no immediate point in moving until he could decide in which direction he should go. It was a remarkable view of a rather unremarkable world. The yellow sun disk had somewhat more than Sol's diameter. Glancing at it, he had a feeling it had been higher above the horizon when he noticed it first, which would make it afternoon in this area. It was warm but not disagreeably so; and now that he thought of it, his body was making no complaints about atmospheric conditions and gravity.

He saw nothing that was of direct interest to him. Ahead and to the left, a parched plain extended from the base of the hills to the horizon. In the low marshland on the right, pools of dark, stagnant water showed occasionally through thick vegetation. Higher up, lichen-gray trees formed a dense forest sweeping along the crests of the hills to within a quarter-mile of where Colgrave sat. The rock-cluttered hillside about him bore only patches of bushy growth.

The fairly abundant animal life in view was of assorted sizes and shapes and, to Colgrave's eyes, rather ungainly in appearance. Down at the edge of the marshes, herds of several species mingled peacefully, devoting themselves to chomping up the vegetation. An odd, green, bulky creature, something like a walking vegetable and about the height of a man, moved about slowly on stubby hind legs. It

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was using paired upper limbs to stuff leaves and whole plants into its lump of a head. Most of the other animals were quadrupeds. Only one of the carnivorous types was active . . . a dog-sized beast with a narrow rod for a body and a long, weaving neck tipped by a round cat head. A pack of them quartered the tall grass between marsh and plain in a purposeful manner, evidently intent on small game.

The other predators Colgrave could see might be waiting for nightfall before they did something about dinner. Half a dozen heavy leonine brutes lay about companionably on the open plain, evidently taking a sunbath. Something much larger and dark squatted in the shade of a tree on the far side of the marsh, watching the browsing herds but making no move to approach them.

The only lifeforms above the size of a lizard on the slopes near Colgrave were a smallish gray hopper, which moved with nervous jerkiness from one clump of shrubs to another. They seemed to be young specimens of the green biped in the marsh. There was a fair number of those downhill on the slopes, ranging between one and three feet in height. They were more active than their elders; now and then about two or three would go gamboling clumsily around a bush together, like fat puppies at play. After returning to the business of stripping clumps of leaves from the shrubbery they would stuff them into the mouth-slits of their otherwise featureless heads. One of them, eating steadily away, was about twenty feet below him. It showed no interest whatever in the visitor from Earth.

However he considered the matter, he couldn't have been stumbling around by himself on this world for more than fifteen hours. And he could imagine no circumstances under which he might have been abandoned here deliberately. Therefore there should be, within a fifteen-hour hike at the outside, something — ship, camp, Intelligence post, settlement — from which he had started out.

If it was a ship, it might be a broken wreck. But even a wreck would provide shelter, food, perhaps a means of sending an SOS call into space. There might be somebody else still alive on it. If there wasn't, studying the ship itself should give him many indications of what had occurred, and why he was here.

Whatever he would find, he had to get back to his starting point —

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Colgrave stiffened. Then he swore, relaxed slightly, sat still. There was a look of intense concentration on his face.

Quietly, unnoticed, while his attention was fixed on the immediate problem, a part of his lost memories had returned. They picked up at the instant he was walking along the hall toward Redman's office, ran on for a number of months, ended again in the same complete, uncompromising manner as before.

He still didn't know why he was on this world. But he felt he was close to the answer now — perhaps very close indeed.

II

The Lorn Worlds, Imperial Rala — the Sigma File —

Imperial Rala, the trouble maker, two centuries ago the most remote of the scattered early Earth colonies, now a compact heavy-industry civilization which had indicated for some time that it intended to supplant Earth as the leading interstellar power. It had absorbed a number of other ex-colonies of minor status, turned its attention then on the nearby Lorn Worlds as its first important target of conquest. Colgrave had been assigned to the Lorn Worlds some years previously. At that time the Lornese were attempting to placate Rala and refused all assistance to Earth's intelligence agencies.

Redman had called him to the office that day to inform him there had been a basic shift in Lornese policies. He was being sent back. A full-scale invasion by Imperial Rala was in the making, and the Lorn Worlds had asked for support. Earth's military forces could not be redeployed in sufficient strength to meet a massive thrust in that distant area of space in time to check the expected invasion. When it came, the Lorn Worlds would fight a delaying action, giving ground as slowly as possible until help arrived. Until it did arrive, they would remain sealed off from Earth almost completely by superior Ralan strength.

Colgrave worked with Lornese intelligence men for almost three months, setting up the Sigma File. It contained in code every scrap of previously withheld information they could give against Rala. For decades the Lornese had been concerned almost exclusively with the activities of their menacing neighbor and with their own defensive plans. The file would be of immense importance in determining Earth's immediate strategy. For Rala, its possession would be of equal importance.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Colgrave set off with it finally in a Lornese naval courier to make the return run to Earth. The courier was a very fast small ship which could rely on its speed alone to avoid interception. As an additional precaution, it would follow a route designed to keep it well beyond the established range of Ralan patrols.

A week later, something happened to it. Just what, Colgrave didn't yet know.

Besides himself there had been three men on board; the two pilot-navigators and an engineering officer. They were picked men and Colgrave had no doubt of their competence. He didn't know whether they had been told the nature of his mission, the matter was not brought up. It should have been an uneventful, speedy voyage home.

When one of the Lornese pilots summoned Colgrave to the control room to tell him the courier was being tracked by another ship, the man showed no serious concern. Their pursuer could be identified on the screen; it was a Ralan raider of the *Talada* class, ten times the courier's tonnage but still a rather small ship. More importantly, a *Talada* could produce nothing like the courier's speed.

Nevertheless, Colgrave didn't like the situation in the least. He had been assured that the odds against encountering Ralan vessels in this area of space were improbably high. By nature and training he distrusted coincidences. However, the matter was out of his hands. The pilots already were preparing to shift to emergency speed and, plainly, there was nothing to be done at the moment.

He settled down to watch the operation. One of the pilots was speaking to the engineering officer over the intercom; the other handled the controls.

It was this second man who suddenly gave a startled shout.

In almost the same instant, the ship seemed to be wrenched violently to the left. Colgrave was hurled out of his seat, realized there was nothing he could do to keep from smashing into the bulkhead on his right . .

At that precise point, his memories shut off again.

"Fleegle!" something was crying shrilly. "Fleegle! Fleegle! Fleegle!"

Colgrave started, looked around. The small green biped nearest him downhill was uttering the cries. It had turned and was facing him frontside. Presumably it had just become aware of him and was expressing alarm. It waved its stubby forelimbs excitedly up and down. Farther down the slope several

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of its companions joined in with "Fleegle!" pipings of their own. Others stood watchfully still. They probably had eyes of a sort somewhere in the wrinkled balls of their heads; at any rate, they all seemed to be staring up at him.

"Fleegle! Fleegle! *Fleegle!*"

The whole hillside below suddenly seemed alive with the shrilling voices and waving green forelimbs. Colgrave twisted half around, glanced up the slope behind him.

He was sliding the gun out of its holster as he came quietly to his feet, completing the turn. The thing that had been coming down toward him stopped in midstride, not much more than forty feet away.

It was also a biped, of a very different kind, splotchy gray-black in color and of singularly unpleasant appearance. About eight feet tall, it had long, lean, talon-tipped limbs and a comparatively small body like a bloated sack. The round, black head above the body looked almost fleshless, sharp bone-white teeth as completely exposed as those of a skull. Two circular yellow eyes a few inches above the teeth stared steadily at Colgrave.

He felt a shiver of distaste. The creature obviously was a carnivore and could have become dangerous to him if he hadn't been alerted by the clamor of the fleegle pack. In spite of its scrawny, gangling look, it should weigh around two hundred and fifty pounds, and the teeth and talons would make it a formidable attacker. Perhaps it had come skulking down from the forest to pick up one of the browsing fleegles and hadn't noticed Colgrave until he arose. But he had its full attention now.

He waited, unmoving, gun in hand, not too seriously concerned — a couple of blasts should be enough to rip that pulpy body to shreds — but hoping it would decide to leave him alone. The creature was a walking nightmare, and tangling with unknown lifeforms always involved a certain amount of risk. He would prefer to have nothing to do with it.

The fleegle racket had abated somewhat. But now the toothy biped took a long, gliding step forward and the din immediately set up again. Perhaps it didn't like the noise, or else it was interested primarily in Colgrave; at any rate, it opened its mouth as if it were snarling annoyedly and drew off to the right, moving horizontally along the slope with long, unhurried spider strides, round yellow eyes still fixed on Colgrave. The fleegle

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cries tapered off again as the enemy withdrew. By the time it had reached a point around sixty feet away, the slopes were quiet.

Now the biped started downhill, threading its way deliberately among the boulders like a long-legged, ungainly bird. But Colgrave knew by then it was after him; and those long legs might hurl it forward with startling speed when it decided to attack. He thumbed the safety off the gun.

With the fleegles silent, he could hear the rasping sounds the thing made when it opened its mouth in what seemed to be its version of a snarl . . . working up its courage, Colgrave thought, to tackle the unfamiliar creature it had chanced upon.

As it came level with him on the hillside, it was snarling almost incessantly. It turned to face him then, lifted its clawed forelegs into a position oddly like that of a human boxer, hesitated an instant and came on swiftly.

A shrill storm of fleegle pipings burst out along the slope behind Colgrave as he raised the gun. He'd let the thing cut the distance between them in half, he decided, then blow it apart . . .

Almost with the thought, he saw the big biped stumble awkwardly across a rock. It made a startled, bawling noise, its forelimbs flinging out to help it catch its balance; then it went flat on its face with a thump.

There was instant stillness on the hillside. The fleegles apparently were watching as intently as Colgrave was. The biped sat up slowly. It seemed dazed. It shook its ugly head and whimpered complainingly, glancing this way and that about the slope. Then the yellow eyes found Colgrave.

Instantly, the biped leaped to its feet, and Colgrave hurriedly brought the gun up again. But the thing wasn't resuming its charge. It wheeled, went plunging away up the slope, now and then uttering the bawling sound it had made as it stumbled. It appeared completely panicked.

Staring after it, Colgrave scratched his chin reflectively with his free hand. After a moment, he resafetied the gun, shoved it back into the holster. He felt relieved but puzzled.

The biped, plainly, was not a timid sort of brute. It must possess a certain amount of innate ferocity to have felt impelled to attack a creature of whose fighting ability it knew nothing. Then why this sudden, almost ludicrous flight? It might be convinced he had knocked it down in some manner as it came at him, but still —

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Colgrave shrugged. It was unimportant, after all. The biped had almost reached the top of the slope by now, was angling to the left to reach the lichen-gray forest a few hundred yards away. Its pace hadn't lessened noticeably. He was rid of it.

Then, as Colgrave's gaze shifted along the boulder-studded top of the hill, something like a half-remembered fact seemed to nudge his mind. He stared, scowling abstractedly. Was there something familiar about that skyline? Something he should . . . he made a shocked sound.

An instant later, he was climbing hurriedly, in something like a panic of his own, up the rocky slope.

Beyond that crest, he remembered now, the ground dropped away into a shallow valley. And in that valley — how many hours ago? — he had landed the Ralan *Talada*'s lifeboat, with the Sigma File on board. Every minute he had spent wandering dazedly about the area since then had brought him closer to certain recapture —

III

He had been slammed against the bulkhead on the Lornese courier with enough violence to stun him. When he awoke, he was a prisoner under guard on the *Talada*, lying on a bunk to which he was secured in a manner designed to make him as comfortable as possible. The cabin's furnishings indicated it belonged to one of the ship's officers.

It told Colgrave among other things that they knew who he was. Raiders of the *Talada* class had a liquid-filled compartment in their holds into which several hundred human beings could be packed at a time, layered like so many sardines, and kept alive and semiconscious until the ship returned to port. An ordinary prisoner would simply have been dumped into that vat.

His suspicions were soon confirmed. A swarthy gentleman, who addressed Colgrave by name and introduced himself as Colonel Ajoran, an intelligence agent of Imperial Rala, came into the cabin. He waved out the attendant guard, offered Colgrave a cigarette, outlined his situation briefly to him.

Rala had obtained information of his mission on the Lorn Worlds and arranged to have the courier which would take him back to Earth with the Sigma File intercepted along any of the alternate routes it might take. The courier's engineering officer was a Ralan agent who had jammed the emergency drive to block their escape, then, as an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

additional measure, released a paralysis gas to keep Colgrave and the Lornese pilots helpless until the courier could be boarded. Colgrave already had been knocked out by the jolt given the ship by the jammed drive, but the pilots had some seconds left in which to act.

One of them had shot himself in preference to becoming a Ralan prisoner. The other had shot the engineering officer, had been captured with Colgrave and was at present being tortured to death in retribution for his ill-considered slaying of a Ralan agent.

Colonel Ajoran offered Colgrave another cigarette, made a few philosophical remarks about the fortunes of war, and came out with his proposition.

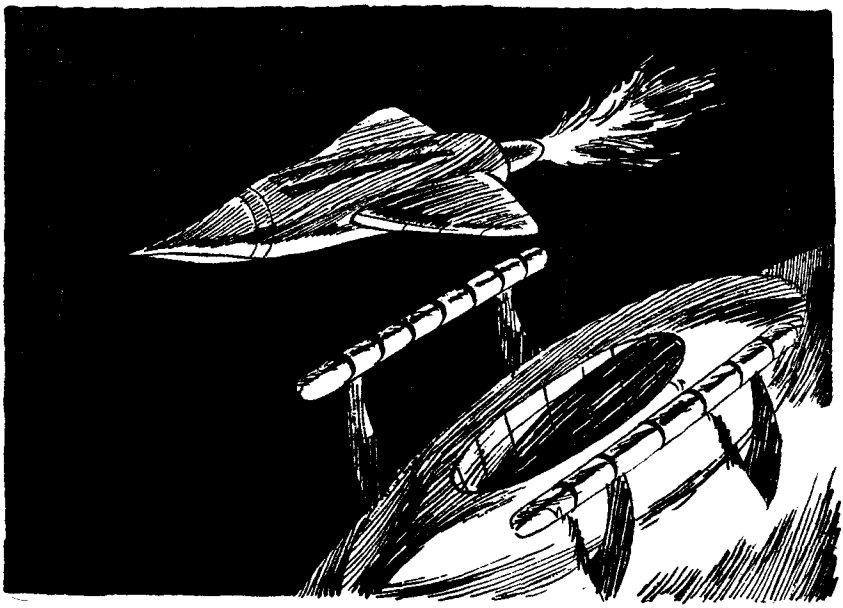
He wanted Colgrave's help in decoding and transcribing the Sigma File immediately. In return he would see to it that when they reached Imperial Rala, Colgrave would be treated as a reasonable man who understood that the only course open to him was to serve Ralan interests as effectively as he previously had served those of Earth. In that event, he would find, Ajoran assured him, that Rala was generous to those who served it well.

Implying that their discussion would be continued after dinner, the colonel then excused himself, called the guard back in and left the cabin.

During the next hour Colgrave put in some heavy thinking. He had made one observation which presently might be of use to him. At the moment, of course, he could do nothing but wait. Colonel Ajoran's plan was a bold one but made sense. Evidently he held a position fairly high up in the echelons of Ralan intelligence. Knowing the contents of the Sigma File in detail, he immediately would become an important man to rival government groups to whom the information otherwise would not be readily available. He could improve his standing by many degrees at one stroke.

At the end of the hour, dinner was served to Colgrave in his cabin by a woman who was perhaps as beautiful, in an unusual way, as any he had seen. She was very slender; her skin seemed almost as pure a white as her close-cropped hair, and her eyes were so light a blue that in any other type they would have appeared completely colorless. She gave, nevertheless, an immediate impression of vitality and contained energy. She told Colgrave her name was Hace, that she was Ajoran's lady, and that she had been instructed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



to see to it that he was provided with every reasonable comfort while he considered Ajoran's proposal.

She went on chatting agreeably until Colgrave had finished his dinner in the bunk. The colonel then joined them for coffee. The discussion remained a very indirect one, but Colgrave presently had the impression that he was being offered an alliance by Ajoran. He was one of Earth's top military agents, possessed unique information which the colonel could put to extremely good use on Rala. Colgrave would, in effect, remain on Ajoran's staff and receive every consideration due a valuable associate. He gathered that one of the immediate shipboard considerations being proffered for his cooperation was the colonel's lady.

When the pair left him, Ajoran observing that the *Talada's* sleep period had begun, the thing had been made clear enough. Neither of the two guards assigned to Colgrave reappeared in the cabin — which he had learned was a section of Ajoran's own shipboard suite — and the door remained closed. Presumably he was to be left undisturbed to his reflections for the next seven hours.

Colgrave did not stay awake long. He had a professional's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

appreciation of the value of rest when under stress; and he already had appraised his situation here as thoroughly as was necessary.

He had a minimum goal — the destruction of the Sigma File — and he had observed something which indicated the goal might be achieved if he waited for circumstances to favor him. Beyond that, he had an ascending series of goals with an ascending level of improbability. They also had been sufficiently considered. There was nothing else he cared to think about at the moment. He stretched out and fell asleep almost at once.

When he awoke some time later with the hairs prickling at the base of his skull, he believed for a moment he was dreaming of the thing he had not cared to think about. There was light on his right and the shreds of a voice . . . ghastly whispered exhalations from a throat which had lost the strength to scream. Colgrave turned his head to the right, knowing what he would see.

Part of the wall to one side of the door showed now as a vision screen; the light and the whispers came from there. Colgrave told himself he was seeing a recording, that the Lornese pilot captured with him had been dead for hours. Colonel Ajoran was a practical man who would have brought this part of the matter to an end without unreasonable delay so that he could devote himself fully to his far more important dealings with Colgrave, and the details shown in the screen indicated the pilot could not be many minutes from death.

The screen slowly went dark again and the whispers ended. Colgrave wiped sweat from his face and turned on his side. There was nothing at all he could have done for the pilot. He had simply been shown the other side of Ajoran's proposition.

A few minutes later, he was asleep again.

When he awoke the next time, the cabin was lit. His two guards were there, one of them arranging Colgrave's breakfast on a wall table across from the bunk. The other simply stood with his back to the door, a nerve gun in his hand, his eyes on Colgrave. Fresh clothes, which Colgrave recognized as his own, brought over from the courier, had been placed on a chair. The section of wall which ordinarily covered the small adjoining bathroom was withdrawn.

The first guard completed his arrangements and addressed Colgrave with an air of surly deference. Colonel Ajoran extended

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his compliments, was waiting in the other section of the suite and would like to see Major Colgrave there after he had dressed and eaten. Having delivered the message, the guard came over to unfasten Colgrave from the bunk, his companion shifting to a position from which he could watch the prisoner during the process. That done, the two withdrew from the room, Colgrave's eyes following them reflectively.

He showered, shaved, dressed, and had an unhurried breakfast. He could assume that Ajoran felt the time for indirect promises and threats was over, and that they would get down immediately now to the business on hand.

When Colgrave came out of the cabin, some thirty minutes after being released, he found his assumption confirmed. This section of the suite was considerably larger than the sleep cabin; the colonel and Hace were seated at the far right across the room, and a guard stood before a closed door, a little left of the section's center line. The door presumably opened on one of the *Talada*'s passages. The guard was again holding a nerve gun, and a second gun of the same kind lay on a small table beside Ajoran. Hace sat at a recording apparatus just beyond the colonel. Evidently she doubled as his secretary when the occasion arose.

At the center of the room, on a table large enough to serve as a work desk, was writing material, a tape reader and, near the left side of the table, the unopened Sigma File.

Colgrave absorbed the implications of the situation as he came into the room. The three of them there were on edge, and the nerve guns showed his present status — they wouldn't injure him but could knot him up painfully in an instant and leave him helpless for minutes. He was being told his actions would have to demonstrate that he deserved Ajoran's confidence.

Almost simultaneously, the realization came to him that the favorable circumstances for which he had decided to wait were at hand.

He went up to the table, looked curiously down at the Sigma File. It was about the size and shape of a briefcase set upright. Colgrave glancing over at Ajoran, said, "I'm taking it for granted you've had the destruct charge removed."

Ajoran produced a thin smile. "Since it could have no useful purpose now," he said, "I did, of course, have it removed."

Colgrave gave him an ironic bow. His left hand, brushing back, struck the Sigma File, sent

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it toppling toward the edge of the table.

He might as well have stuck a knife point into all three of them. A drop to the floor could not damage the file, but they were too keyed up to check their reactions. Ajoran started to his feet with a sharp exclamation; even Hace came half out of her chair. The guard moved more effectively. He leaped forward from the wall, bending down, still holding the nerve gun, caught the file with his wrist and free hand as it went off the table, turned to place it back on the table.

Colgrave stepped behind him. In the back of the jackets of both guards he had seen a lumpy bulge near the hip, indicating each carried a second gun, which could be assumed to be a standard energy type. His left hand caught the man by the shoulder, his right found the holstered gun under the jacket, twisted it upward and fired as he bent the guard over it. His left arm tingled — Ajoran had cut loose with the nerve gun, trying to reach him through the guard's body. Then Colgrave had the gun clear, saw Ajoran coming around on his right and snapped off two hissing shots, letting the guard slide to the floor. Ajoran stopped short, hauled open the sleep cabin door and was through it in an instant, slamming it shut behind him.

Across the room, Hace, almost at the other door, stopped, too, as Colgrave turned toward her. They looked at each other a moment, then Colgrave stepped around the guard and walked up to her, gun pointed. When he was three steps away, Hace closed her eyes and stood waiting, arms limp at her sides. His left fist smashed against the side of her jaw and she dropped like a rag doll.

Colgrave looked back. The guard was twisting contortedly about on the floor. His face showed he was dead, but it would be a minute or two before the nerve charge worked itself out of his body. The colonel's lady wouldn't stir for a while. Ajoran himself . . . Colgrave stared thoughtfully at the door of the sleep cabin.

Ajoran might be alerting the ship from in there at the moment, although there hadn't been any communication device in view. Or he could have picked up some weapon he fancied more than a nerve gun and was ready to come out again. The chances were good, however, that he'd stay locked in where he was until somebody came to inform him the berserk prisoner had been dealt with. It wasn't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

considered good form in Rala's upper echelons to take personal risks which could be delegated to subordinates.

Whatever happened, Colgrave told himself he could achieve his minimum goal any time he liked now. A single energy bolt through the Sigma File would ignite it explosively. And its destruction, getting it out of Ralan hands, had been as much as he reasonably could expect to accomplish in the situation.

He glanced at the closed door to the sleep cabin again, at the door which should open on one of the *Talada*'s passages, and decided he didn't feel reasonable.

He took the Sigma File from the table, carried it over to the passage door and set it down against the wall. He'd expected to see the second guard come bouncing in through the door as soon as the commotion began in here. The fact that he hadn't indicated either that he'd been sent away or that Ajoran's suite was soundproofed. Probably the latter . . .

Colgrave raised the gun, grasped the door handle with his left hand, turned it suddenly, hauled the door open

The second guard stood outside, but he wasn't given time to do much more than bulge his eyes at Colgrave.

Colgrave went quickly along the passage, the Sigma File in his left hand, the gun ready again in his right. Now that it was over he felt a little shaky. By the rules he should, in such circumstances, have been satisfied with his minimum goal and destroyed the file before he risked another encounter with an armed man. If he'd been killed just now, it would have been there intact for Rala to decode.

But the other goals looked at least possible now, and he couldn't quite bring himself to put a bolt through the file before it became clear that he'd done as much as he could.

He moved more cautiously as he approached the corner of the passage. This was officer's country, and his plans were based on a remembered general impression of the manner in which the *Talada* raiders were constructed. The passageway beyond the corner was three times the width of this one . . . it might be the main passage he was looking for.

He glanced around the corner, drew back quickly. About thirty feet away in the other side of the passage was a wide doorspace, and two men in officer's uniform had been walking in through it at the moment he looked. Colgrave took a long, slow breath. His next goal sud-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

denly seemed not at all far away.

He waited a few seconds, looked again. Now the passage was clear. Instantly he was around the corner, running down to the doorspace. As he stepped out before it, he saw his guess had been good. He was looking down a short flight of steps into the *Talada*'s control room.

Looking and firing . . . The gun in his hand hissed like an angry cat, but several seconds passed before any of the half-dozen men down there realized he was around. By then two of them were dead. They had happened to be in the gun's way. The drive control panels, the gun's target, were shattering from end to end. Colgrave swung the gun toward a big communicator in a corner. At that moment, somebody discovered him.

The man did the sensible thing. His hand darted out throwing one of the switches before him.

A slab of battle-steel slid down across the doorspace, settling the control room away from the passage.

Colgrave sprinted on down the passage. The emergency siren came on.

The *Talada* howled monstrously like a wounded beast as it rolled and bucked. Suddenly he was in another passage, heard shouts ahead, turned back, stumbled around a corner, went scrambling breathlessly up a steep, narrow stairway.

At its top, he saw ahead of him, like a wish-dream scene, the lit lock, two white-faced crewmen staggering on the heaving deck as they tried to lift a heavy boxed item into it.

Colgrave came roaring toward them, wild-eyed, waving the gun. They looked around at him, turned and ran as he leaped past them into the lock.

The man at the controls of the *Talada*'s lifeboat died before he realized somebody was running up behind him. Colgrave dropped the Sigma File, hauled the body out of the seat, slid into it . . .

He was several minutes' flight away from the disabled raider before he realized he was laughing like a lunatic.

He was clear. And now the odds, shifting all the way over, were decidedly in his favor. The question was how long it would take them to repair the damage and come after him. With enough of a start, they couldn't know which way he'd headed and the chance of being picked up before he got within range of the Earth patrols became negligible. But first there was the matter of getting the lifeboat fueled for the long run. It used

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

iron, the standard medium; and he had, Colgrave calculated, enough for fifteen hours' flight on hand.

Which wasn't too bad. It would have been nicer if he could have given the two crewmen time to dump another few boxes of ingots on board before he took off. But a scan of the stellar neighborhood showed two planets respectively seven and eight hours away indicating conditions which should allow a man to stay a short time without serious damage or discomfort. The lifeboat had the standard iron location and refining equipment on board. A few hours on either of those worlds; and he'd be ready.

After dropping the body of the Ralan pilot into space, he decided the seven hour run gave him a slight advantage. Once the *Talada* got moving, it had speed enough to check over both worlds without losing a significant amount of time. They could figure out his fuel requirements as well as he. If they arrived before he was finished and gone, the raider's scanning devices were almost certain to spot the lifeboat wherever he tried to hide it.

The chances seemed very good that they simply wouldn't get there soon enough. But the minimum goal remained a factor. Colgrave decided to cache the Sigma File in some easily identifiable spot as soon as he touched ground, take the boat to another section of the planet to do his mining, come back for the file when he was prepared to leave. It would cut the risk of being surprised with it to almost nothing . . .

IV

How many hours had passed since then? Clawing his way up through the boulders and shrubbery, slipping in loose soil. Colgrave glanced back for a moment at the sun. It was noticeably lower in the sky again, appeared to be dropping almost visibly toward the horizon. But that told him nothing. He remembered the landing now: it had been daylight and he had come down to hide the Sigma File . . . *had* hidden it, his memory corrected him suddenly. And then, for the next six or ten or fourteen hours, he appeared to have simply waited around here, in some mental fog, for the *Talada* to come riding its fiery braking jets down from the sky.

The raider might arrive at any moment. Unless . . .

Colgrave blocked off the rest of that thought. The slope had begun to level off as he approached the top; he covered the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

last stretch in a rush, lungs sobbing for breath. He clambered on hastily through a jagged crack in the back of the ridge. For an instant, he saw the shallow dip of the valley beyond.

He dropped flat immediately. They were already here.

It was a shock but one he realized he had half expected. After a few seconds, he crept up to the shelter of a rock from where he could look into the valley without exposing himself.

The *Talada* had set down about a hundred yards back of the lifeboat, perhaps no more than half an hour ago. The smaller vessel's lock stood open; a man came climbing out of it, followed by two others. The last of the three closed the lock and they started back toward the raider, from which other men were emerging. Ajoran had ordered the lifeboat searched first, to make sure the Sigma File wasn't concealed on it. Without that delay they should have caught him while he was still climbing up the slope . . . the group coming out of the *Talada* now was a hunting party; most of them had quick-firing rifles slung across their backs.

They lined up beside the ship while a wedge-shaped device was maneuvered out of the lock. It remained floating a little above the ground near the head of the line, about twenty feet long, perhaps a dozen feet across at its point of greatest width. Colgrave had seen such devices before.

It was a man-tracker, a type used regularly in Ralan expeditions against settlements on other planets. Its power unit and instruments were packed into the narrow tip; most of its space was simply a container, enclosed and filled with the same kind of numbing liquid preservative as that in the prisoner vats in the *Talada* ships. It could be set either to hunt down specific individuals or any and all human beings within its range, and to either kill them as they were overtaken or pick them up with its grapplers and deposit them unharmed in the container. They could use it to follow him now; the clothing he had left on the ship would give it all the indications it needed to recognize and follow his trail.

More men had come out behind the machine, including one in a spacesuit. Colonel Ajoran apparently was assigning almost the entire complement of the *Talada* to the search for Colgrave and the Sigma File.

Colgrave decided he'd seen enough. If he had been observed on the hillside as the *Talada* was descending, they would have gone after him immediately. In-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stead, they would now follow their man-tracker over the ridge and down to the swamp where the herds of native animals were feeding. It gave him a little time.

He crawled backward a dozen feet into the narrow crevasse, rose and retraced his way through it to the other side of the ridge. Beyond the plain, the sun was almost touching the horizon. The gray forest into which the aggressive biped had retreated began a few hundred yards to his right. He'd have better shelter there than among the tumbled rocks of the ridge.

He went loping toward it, keeping below the crest-line. His eyes shifted once toward the swamp. One great tree stood there, towering a good hundred feet above the vegetation about it. The Sigma File was wedged deep among the giant's root, a few feet below the water. He'd seen the tree from the air, put the lifeboat down in the little valley, hurried down to the swamp on foot. Twenty minutes later, the file was buried and he'd started wading back out of the swamp. What had happened between that moment and the one when he found himself sitting on the hillside he still didn't know . . .

He reached the forest, came back among the trees over the top of the ridge until he saw

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the valley again. During the few minutes that had passed, the ridge's evening shadow had spread across half the lower ground. It had seemed possible that when they realized how close it was to nightfall here, the hunt for him would be put off till morning. But Ajoran evidently wanted no delay. The man in the spacesuit still stood near the open lock of the ship, but the search party was coming across the valley behind their tracking machine. They headed for a point of the open ridge about a quarter-mile away from Colgrave. They'd have lights to continue on through the night if necessary.

The chase plan was simple but effective. If the man-tracker hadn't flushed him into view before morning, the *Talada* could take the lifeboat aboard, move after the search party and put down again. They could work on in relays throughout the following day, half of them resting at a time on the ship, until he was run down.

The Sigma File was safest where he'd left it. The tracker's scent perceptors were acute enough to follow his trail through the stagnant swamp, getting signs from the vegetation he'd brushed against or grasped in passing, even from lingering traces in the water itself. And it might very well detect the file beneath the surface. But — ironically, considering Ajoran's purpose — the discovery would be meaningless to the machine except as another indication that the man it was pursuing had been there. It would simply move on after him.

The worst thing he could attempt at the moment would be to get down to the swamp ahead of the searchers and destroy the file. He would almost certainly be sighted on the open slopes below the forest; and either the tracker or the man in the spacesuit could be overhead instants later.

Colgrave's gaze shifted back to the spacesuited figure. He would have to watch out for that one. His immediate role presumably was to act as liaison man between the ship and the hunters, supplementing the communicator reports Ajoran would be getting on the progress of the search. But he was armed with a rifle; and if Colgrave was seen, he could spatter the area around the fugitive with stun-gas pellets while remaining beyond range of a hand weapon. He had floated back up to the *Talada*'s lock for a moment, was now heading out to the ridge, drifting about fifty feet above the ground.

It wasn't a graceful operation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Maneuvering a suit designed for weightless service in space near the surface of a planet never was. But the fellow was handling himself fairly well, Colgrave thought. He came up to the ridge as the troop began filing across it, hovered above the line a few seconds, then swung to the left and moved off in a series of slow, awkward bounces above the hillside. He seemed to be holding something up to his helmet, and Colgrave guessed he was scanning the area with a pair of powerful glasses. After some minutes, he came back.

Colgrave had crossed over to the other side of the ridge to follow the progress of the column. It had swung to the right as it started down, was angling straight toward the swamp along the route he had taken with the file. He watched, chewing his lip. If the man-tracker happened to cross his return trail on the way, he might be in trouble almost immediately . . .

The man in the spacesuit drifted after the search party, passed above them some two hundred feet in the air, then remained suspended and almost unmoving. Colgrave glanced over at the horizon. The sun was nearly out of sight; its thin golden rim shrank and disappeared as he looked at it. Night should follow quickly here, but as yet he couldn't see any advantage the darkness would bring him.

The man in the spacesuit was coming back to the ridge. He hovered above it a moment, settled uncertainly toward the flat top of a boulder, made a stumbling landing and righted himself. He turned toward the plain and the swamp, lifting the object that seemed to be a pair of glasses to the front of his helmet again. Evidently he'd had enough of the suit's airborne eccentricities for a while.

Colgrave's throat worked. The man was less than two hundred yards away . . .

His eyes shifted toward a tuft of shrubs twenty feet beyond the edge of the forest growth.

Some seconds later, he was there, studying the stretch of ground ahead. Other shrubs and rocks big enough to crouch behind . . . but they would give him no cover at all if for some reason the fellow decided to lift back into the air. The fading light wouldn't help then. Those were space glasses he was using, part of the suit, designed to provide clear vision even when only the gleam of distant stars was there for them to absorb.

But perhaps, Colgrave told himself, Spacesuit would not decide to lift back into the air. In

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

any case, no other approach was possible. The far side of the ridge was controlled by the *Talada*'s night-scanners, and they would be in use by now.

He moved, waited, gathered himself and moved again. Spacesuit was directing most of his attention downhill, but now and then he turned for a look along the ridge in both directions. Perhaps, as the air darkened, the closeness of the forest was getting on his nerves. Native sounds were drifting up from the plain, guttural bellowing and long-drawn ululations. The meat eaters were coming awake. Presently there was a series of short, savage roars from the general direction of the swamp; and Colgrave guessed the search party had run into some big carnivore who had never heard about energy rifles. When the roaring stopped with a monstrous scream, he was sure of it.

He had reduced the distance between them by almost half when the spacesuit soared jerkily up from the boulder. Colgrave had a very bad moment. But it lifted no more than a dozen feet, then descended again at a slant which carried it behind the boulder. The man had merely changed his position. And the new position he had selected took them out of each other's sight.

Colgrave was instantly on his feet, running forwards. Here the surface was rutted with weather fissures. He slipped into one of them, drawing out his gun, moved forward at a crouch. A moment later, he had reached the near side of the boulder which Spacesuit had stood.

Where was he now? Colgrave listened, heard a burst of thin, crackling noises. They stopped for some seconds, came briefly again, stopped again. The suit communicator . . . the man must have taken off the helmet, or the sound wouldn't have been audible. He couldn't be far away.

Colgrave went down on hands and knees, edged along the side of the boulder to the right. From here he could see down the hillside. On the plain, the night was gathering; the boundaries between the open land and the swamp had blurred. But the bobbing string of tiny light beams down there, switching nervously this way and that, must already be moving through the marsh.

The communicator noises came again, now from a point apparently no more than fifteen feet beyond the edge of the boulder ahead of Colgrave. It was as close as he could get. It was important that the man in the space suit should die instantly, which meant a head shot. Colgrave rose up, stepped out quiet-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ly around the boulder, gun pointed.

The man stood faced half away, the helmet tipped back on his shoulders. In the last instant, as Colgrave squeezed down on the trigger, sighting along the barrel, the head turned and he saw with considerable surprise that it was Colonel Ajoran.

Then the gun made its spiteful hissing sound.

Ajoran's head jerked slightly to the side and his eyes closed. The spacesuit held him upright for the second or two before he toppled. Colgrave already was there, reaching under the collar for one of the communicator's leads. He found it, gave it a sharp twist, felt it snap.

V

In the *Talada,* the man watching the night-scanners saw Colonel Ajoran's spacesuit appear above the ridge and start back to the ship. He informed the control room and the lock attendant.

The outer lock door opened as the suit came up to it. Colgrave made a skidding landing inside His performance in the suit had been no improvement on Ajoran's. He shut off the suit drive, clumped up to the inner door, left arm raised across the front of the helmet, hand fumbling with the oxygen hose. It would hide his face for a moment from whoever was on the other side of the door. His right hand rested on his gun.

The door opened. The attendant stood at rigid attention before the control panel six feet away, rifle grounded, eyes front. Mentally blessing Ralan discipline, Colgrave stepped up beside him, drew out the gun and gave the back of the man's skull a solid thump with the barrel.

When the attendant opened his eyes again a few minutes later, his head ached and there was a gag in his mouth. His hands were tied behind him, and Colgrave was wearing his uniform.

Colgrave hauled him to his feet, poked a gun muzzle against his back.

"Lead the way to the control room," he said.

The attendant led the way. Colgrave followed, the uniform cap pulled down to conceal his face. Ajoran's handgun and a stunner he had taken from the attendant were stuck into his belt. The attendant's energy rifle and the one which had been strapped to the spacesuit were concealed in a closet near the lock. He had assembled quite an arsenal.

When they reached the wide main passage in the upper level of the ship, he halted the lock

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

attendant. They retraced their steps to the last door they had passed. Colgrave opened it. An office of some kind . . . he motioned the attendant in and followed him, closing the door.

He came out a few seconds later, shoved the stunner back under his belt, and stood listening. The *Talada* seemed almost eerily silent. Not very surprising, he thought. The number of men who had set out after him indicated that only those of the crew who were needed to coordinate the hunt and maintain the ship's planetary security measures had remained on board. That could be ten or twelve at most; and every one of them would be stationed at his post at the moment.

Colgrave went out into the main passage, walked quietly along it. Now he could hear an intermittent murmur of voices from the control room. One of them seemed to be that of a woman, but he wasn't sure. They were being silent again before he came close enough to distinguish what was being said.

There was nothing to be gained by hesitating at this point. The control room was the nerve center of the ship, but there couldn't be more than four or five of them in it. Colgrave had a gun in either hand as he reached the open doorspace. He turned through it, started unhurriedly down the carpeted stairs leading into the control room, eye and mind photographing the details of the scene below.

Ajoran's lady was nearest, seated at a small table, her attention on the man before the communicator set in a corner alcove on the left. This man's back was turned. A gun was belted to his waist. Farther down in the control room sat another man, facing the passage but bent over some instrument on the desk before him. The desk shielded him almost completely, which made him the most dangerous of the three at the moment. No one else was in view, but that didn't necessarily mean that no one else was here.

Hace became aware of him as he reached the foot of the stairs. Her head turned sharply; she seemed about to speak. Then her eyes were wide with shocked recognition.

He'd have to get the man at the desk the instant she screamed. But she didn't scream. Instead, her right hand went up, two fingers lifted and spread. She nodded fiercely at the communicator operator, next at the man behind the desk.

Only two of them? Well, that probably was true. But he'd better use the stunner on Hace

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

before attempting to deal with two armed men.

At that moment, the communicator operator looked around.

He was young and his reactions were as fast as Hace's. He threw himself sideways out of the chair with a shout of warning, hit the floor rolling over and clawing for his gun. The man behind the desk had no chance. As he jerked upright, startled, an energy bolt took him in the head. The operator had no real chance, either. Colgrave swung the gun to the left, saw for an instant eyes fixed on him, bright with hatred, and the other gun coming up, and fired again.

He waited a number of seconds, then, alert for further motion. But the control room remained quiet. So Ajoran's lady hadn't lied. She stayed where she was, unstirring, until he turned toward her. Then she said quietly, her expression still incredulous, "It seemed like magic! How could you get into the ship?"

Colgrave looked at the dark, ugly bruise his fist had printed along the side of her jaw, said, "In Ajoran's spacesuit, of course."

She hesitated. "He's dead?"

"Quite dead," Colgrave said thoughtfully.

"I wanted," Hace said, "to kill him myself. I would have done it finally, I believe . . ." She hesitated again. "It doesn't matter now. What can I do to help you? They're in trouble down in the swamp."

"What kind of trouble?"

"That isn't clear. It began two or three minutes ago, but we haven't been able to get an intelligible report from the two communicator men. They were excited, shouted, almost irrational."

Colgrave scowled. After a moment, he shook his head. "Let's clean up the ship first. How many on board?"

"Nine besides those two . . . and myself."

"The man in the lock's taken care of," Colgrave said. "Eight. On the lifeboat?"

"Nobody. Ajoran had a trap prepared for you there, in case you came back before they caught you. You could have got inside, but you couldn't have started the engines, and you would have been unable to get out again."

Colgrave grunted. "Can you get the men in the ship to come individually to the control room?"

"I see. Yes, I think I can do that."

"I'll want to check you over for weapons first."

"Of course." Hace smiled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

slightly, stood up. "Why should you trust me?"

"I wouldn't know," Colgrave said.

They came in, unsuspecting, one by one; and, one by one, the stunner brought them down from behind. Shortly afterwards, a freight carrier floated into the *Talada*'s vat room. Hace stood aside as Colgrave unlocked the cover of the drop hole in the deck and hauled it back. A heavy stench surged up from the vat. Colgrave looked down a moment at the oily black liquid eight feet below, then dragged the nine unconscious men in turn over from the carrier, dropped them in, and resealed the vat.

A man's voice babbled and sobbed. Another man screamed in sudden fright: then there was a sound of rapid, panicky breathing mingled with the sobs

Colgrave switched off the communicator, looked over at Hace. "Is this what it was like before?"

She moistened her lips. "No, this is insanity!" Her voice was unsteady. "They're both completely incapable of responding to us now. What could there be in that swamp at night to have terrified them to that extent? At least some of the others should have come back to the ship . . ." She paused. "Colgrave, why do we stay here? You know what they're like — why bother with them? You don't need any of them to handle the ship. One person can take it to Earth if necessary."

"I know," Colgrave said. He studied her, added, "I'm wondering a little why you're willing to help me get to Earth."

Anger showed for an instant in the pale, beautiful face.

"I'm no Ralan! I was picked up in a raid on Beristeen when I was twelve. I've never wanted to do anything but get away from Rala since that day."

Colgrave grunted, rubbed his chin. "I see . . . Well, we can't leave immediately. For one thing, I left the Sigma File in that swamp."

Hace stared at him. "You haven't destroyed it?"

"No. It never quite came to that point."

She laughed shortly. "Colgrave, you're rather wonderful! Ajoran was convinced the file was lost, and that his only chance of saving his own skin was to get you back alive so he could find out what you had learned on the Lorn Worlds . . . No, you can't leave the file behind, of course! I understand that. But why don't we lift the ship out of atmosphere until it's morning here?" She nodded at the communicator. "*That* disturbance — whatever they've

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

aroused down there — should have settled out by then. The swamp will be quiet again. Then you can work out a way to get the file back without too much danger."

Colgrave shook his head, got to his feet. "No, that shouldn't be necessary. The man-tracker was being monitored from the ship, wasn't it? Where is the control set kept?"

Hace indicated the desk twenty feet behind her where the second man had sat when Colgrave came into the control room.

"It's lying over there. That's what he was doing."

Colgrave said, "Let's take a look at it. I want the thing to return to the ship." He started toward the desk.

Hace stood up, went over to the desk with him. "I'm afraid I can't tell you how to operate it."

"I should be able to do it," Colgrave said. "I played around a few hours once with a captured man-tracker which had been shipped back to Earth. This appears to be a very similar model." He looked down at the moving dark blurs in the screen which formed the center of the control set, twisted a knob to one side of it. "Let's see what it's doing now before I have it return to the ship."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The screen cleared suddenly. The scene was still dark, but in the machine's night-vision details were distinct. A rippling weed bed was gliding slowly past below; a taller leafy thicket ahead moved closer. Then the thicket closed about the tracker.

Hace said, "The operator was trying to discover through the tracker what was happening to the men down there, but it moved out of the range of their lights almost as soon as the disturbance began. Apparently the devices, once set, can't be turned around."

"Not unless you're riding them," Colgrave agreed. "Telemonitoring starts them off and observes what they're doing. They either go on and finish their business, or get their sensors switched off and return to their starting point. It's still following my trail. Now . . ."

"What's that light?" Hace asked uneasily. "It looks like the reflection of a fire."

The tracker had emerged from the thicket, swung to the left, and was gliding low over an expanse of open water, almost touching it. There were pale orange glitters on the surface ahead of it.

Colgrave studied them, said, "At a guess it simply means there's a moon in the sky." He pushed a stud on the set, and the scene vanished. "That wiped out the last instructions it was given. It will come back to the ship in a minute or two."

Hace looked at him. "What do you have in mind?"

"I'm riding it down to the swamp."

"Not now! In the morning you . . ."

"I don't think I'll be in any danger. Now let's find a place where I'm sure you'll stay locked up until I get back. As you said, one person can do all that's needed to lift this ship off the planet and head away . . ."

VI

Five hundred feet above the ground, the man-tracker's open saddle was not the most reassuring place to be in. But the machine was considerably easier to maneuver than the spacesuit had been and the direct route by air to the giant tree beneath which he'd concealed the Sigma File was the shortest and fastest. Colgrave was reasonably certain nothing had happened to the file, but he wouldn't know until he held it in his hands again.

The orange moon that had pushed above the horizon was a big one, the apparent diameter of its disk twice that of the vanished sun. Colgrave was holding the tracker's pace down. But no

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more than a few minutes passed before he could make out the big tree in the vague light, ahead and a little to his right. He guided the machine over to it, circled its crown slowly twice, looking down, then lowered the tracker down to a section of open water near the base of the tree, turned it and went gliding in toward the tangled root system of the giant. He turned the control set off, remained in the saddle a few moments, looking about and listening.

The swamp was full of sound, most of it of a minor nature . . . chirps, twittering, soft hoots. Something whistled piercingly three times in the tree overhead. Behind him, not too far off, was a slow, heavy splashing which gradually moved away. At the very limit of his hearing was something else. It might have been human voices, faint with distance, or simply his imagination at work.

Nearby, nothing moved. Colgrave pulled the control set out of its saddle frame, slid down from the saddle, clinging to it with one hand, finally dropped a few inches into a layer of mud above the mass of tree roots. He climbed farther up on the roots, found a dry place under one of them where he shoved the control set in out of sight. Then he went climbing cautiously on around the great trunk, slipping now and then on the slimy root tangle beneath the mud . . .

And here was where he had concealed the Sigma File. A little bay of water extended almost to the trunk itself about five feet deep. Colgrave slipped down into it. There was firm footing here. He moved forward to the tip of the bay, took a deep breath and crouched down. The warm water closed over his head. He groped about among the root shelves before him, touched the file, gripped it by its handle and drew it out.

He clambered up out of the water, started back around the tree . . .

And there the thing stood.

Colgrave stopped short. This was almost an exact duplication of what happened after he brought the Sigma File down here and concealed it. It had been daylight then, and what he saw now as a bulky manlike shape in the shadow of the tree had been clearly visible. It was a green monstrosity, heavy as a gorilla, with a huge, round bobbing ball of a head which showed no features at all through its leafy appendages. It was bigger than it had looked at a distance from the hillside, standing almost eight foot tall.

The first time, it had been only

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a few yards away, moving toward him around the tree, when he saw it. His instant reaction had been to haul out his gun . . .

Now he stayed still, looking at it. His heart beat had speeded up noticeably. But this was, he told himself, an essentially vegetarian creature. And it was peaceable because it had a completely effective means of defense. It could sense the impulse to attack in an approaching carnivore, and it could make the carnivore forget its purpose.

As often as was necessary.

Colgrave made himself start forwards. He had no intention, his mind kept repeating, of harming this oversized fleegle, and it had no intention of harming him. It did not move out of his path as he came toward it, but turned slowly to keep facing him as he clambered past over the roots a few feet away.

Colgrave didn't look back at it and heard no movement behind him. He saw the man-tracker floating motionless above the mud ahead, put the file down and pulled the tracker's control set out from under the root where he had left it. A minute or two later, he was back in the machine's saddle, out in the moonlight away from the big tree, the Sigma File fastened to his belt.

He tapped a pattern of instructions into the control set, checked them very carefully, slid the set into the saddle frame and switched it on.

The man-tracker swung about purposefully, went gliding away through the swamp. A hundred yards on, it encountered three fleegles, somewhat smaller than the one under the tree, wading slowly leg-deep through the mud. They stopped as the machine appeared, and Colgrave thought friendly and admiring things about fleegles until they were well behind him again. Perhaps a minute later, the man-tracker stopped in the air above the first of the *Talada*'s lost crew.

He had crawled into a thicket and was blubbering noisily to himself. When two of the machine's grapplers flicked down into the thicket and locked about him, he bawled in horror. Colgrave looked straight ahead, not particularly wanting to watch this. There was a click behind him as the preservative tank opened. For a moment, his nostrils were full of the stink of the liquid. Then there was a splash, and the bawling stopped abruptly. The tank clicked shut.

The man-tracker swung around on a new point, set off again. Its present instructions were to trail and collect every

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

human being within the range of its sensory equipment, except its rider.

They'd been on edge to begin with here, Colgrave told himself. Their rifles already had brought down one brute which came roaring monstrously at them in the dusk; and presumably the rifles could handle anything else they might encounter. But they hadn't liked the look of the swamp the man-tracker was leading them into. Wading through pools, slipping in the mud, flashing their lights about at every menacing shadow, they followed the machine, mentally cursing the order that had sent them after the Earth intelligence agent as night was closing in.

And then a great green ogre was standing in one of the light beams . . .

Naturally, they tried to shoot it.

And as they made the decision, they began to forget.

Progressive waves of amnesia . . . first, perhaps, only a touch. The men lifting rifles forgot they were lifting them. Until they saw the fleegle again —

The past few hours might be wiped out next. They stood in a swamp at night, not knowing how they'd got there or why they were there. But they had rifles in their hands, and an ogrish shape was watching them

Months forgotten now. The fleegle could keep it up.

About that point, they'd begun to stampede, scattered, ploughed this way and that through the swamp. But the fleegles were everywhere. And as often as a gun was lifted in panic, another chunk of memory would go. Until the last of the weapons was dropped.

The man-tracker wasn't rounding up men but children in grown-up bodies, huddled in hiding on a wet, dark nightmare world, dazed and uncomprehending, unable to do more than wail wildly as the machine picked them up and placed them in its tank.

VII

Colgrave came out of the compartment where the man-tracker was housed, locked the door and turned off the control set.

"You haven't closed the vat yet," Hace said.

He nodded. "I know. Let's go back."

"I'm still not clear on just what did happen," she went on, walking beside him up the passage. "You say they lost their memories . . .?"

"Yes. It's a temporary thing. I had the same experience when I first got here, though I don't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seem to have been hit as hard as most of them were. If they weren't floating around in that slop now, they'd start remembering within hours."

He opened the door to the vat room, motioned her inside. Hace wrinkled her nose in automatic distaste at the odor of the preservative, said, "It's very strange. How could any creature affect a human mind in that manner?"

"I don't know," Colgrave said. "But it isn't important now." He followed her in, closing the door behind him, went on, "Now this will be rather unpleasant, so let's get it over with."

She glanced back at him. "Get what over with, Colgrave?"

"You're getting the ride to Earth you said you wanted," Colgrave told her, "but you're riding along with the crew down there."

Hace whirled to face him, her eyes wild with fear.

"Ah — no! Colgrave . . . I . . . you couldn't . . ."

"I don't want you awake on the ship," he told her. "Though I might have thought of some other way of making sure you wouldn't be a problem if my pilot hadn't died as he did."

"What does that have to do with me?" Her voice was shrill. "Didn't I try to help you in the control room?"

"You played it smart in the control room," Colgrave said. "But you would have gone into the vat with the first group if I hadn't thought you might be useful in some way."

"But *why?* Am I to blame for what Ajoran did?"

Colgrave shrugged. "I'm not sorry for what happened to Ajoran. But I'm not stupid enough to think that a Ralan intelligence agent would go out in a spacesuit to help look for me, leaving the ship in charge of a couple of junior officers. Ajoran went out because he was ordered to do it. And there were a few other things. What they add up to, lady, is that you were the senior agent in this operation. And it would suit you just fine to get back to Rala with the Sigma File, and no one left alive to tell how you almost let it get away from you."

Hace wet her lips, her eyes darting wildly about his face.

"Colgrave, I . . ." she started to plead.

"No," Colgrave said. He placed his hand flat against her chest, shoved hard. Hace went stumbling backward toward the open drop hole of the vat. There was a scream and a splash. He walked over and looked down. The oily surface was smooth again. He slammed the cover down over the drop hole, sealed it and left the room.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

About two hours had passed. The *Talada* hung in space near the fringes of the solar system which contained the fleegle world. Colgrave had completed his studies of the ship's navigational system. It was a standard setup for long-range vessels, self-locating, self-focussing. Once he got the raider under way, there would be less for him to do than there would have been on the lifeboat.

But there was one more matter to take care of before he left. On the planet he hadn't dared let himself think about it.

The *Talada*'s computers knew where the ship was but weren't registering the fact. For most navigational purposes, it was meaningless. You only had to know where you wanted to go. Carrying out a location check was a separate operation which would take him at least another hour.

The time wouldn't be wasted, Colgrave thought. Recording the ship's exact coordinates here might turn out to be as important as getting the Sigma File to Earth — more so . . .

It had been at the other end of the swamp, shortly before he returned to the ship, while the tracker was picking up a man who had got farther than most, that he suddenly had become aware of a glow of greenish luminescence on his left and turned in the saddle to look at it.

There was a wide opening in the forested hillside above the level of the swamp. Colgrave had stared at it with a feeling almost of superstitious fear. A group of fleegles was streaming slowly into it; a few others were emerging. There was a sense of something ordered and arranged stretching far back into the dim green light under the hill. The equivalant of human buildings, he had thought. And beyond them, taller than the structures, he could make out vague, green figures moving hugely about.

His skin was crawling when the tracker deposited its last captive in the tank, turned and went gliding back toward the center of the swamp. He had a strong conviction he should do nothing whatever to draw attention to himself here. But as the machine came up to a dense thicket which would have shut off his view, Colgrave looked back. The opening in the hill had vanished.

An underground civilization of some kind, and intelligence . . . In all the time man had been in space, there had been no previous recorded contact with another intelligent race.

Perhaps we've never taken the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

time to really look for them, Colgrave thought. Our main business somehow always seems to be fighting among ourselves.

As the coming war with Rala would prevent any immediate action being taken on the report he would make. But some day a scientific expedition would start out from Earth to settle down on the fleegle world and make contact —

Colgrave leaned forward in his chair, pulled the *Talada*'s locator toward him, snapped it into the computing system, and placed his hand on the activating switch.

Then he went still, head raised, tilted sideways a little in an attitude of listening.

From somewhere, very far away, a huge, quiet voice was addressing him.

"FORGET IT," it said.

Colgrave gave the locator a puzzled look, pulled it out of the system, stood up and restored it to its casing.

He returned, studied the focal chart which contained Earth briefly once more, then reached out and cut in the main drive. The *Talada* began to move.

Colgrave settled back in his chair, watching a not very remarkable yellow sun slide slowly away from him in the screen. There was a momentary uneasy feeling that something else was also sliding away . . . something very important that now would be forever lost. Then he forgot it.

—JAMES H. SCHMITZ

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FORECAST

Next issue Frank Herbert will be with us again with a novelette called *Committee of the Whole*. We're always glad to welcome the author of *Dustworld*, *Under Pressure* and any number of other well-remembered stories; we're pleased, too, to have in the same issue Keith Laumer, Gordon R. Dickson, John Brunner, Willy Ley and Algis Budrys; but we have an idea that the real news of the issue will be two writers you've seldom seen before.

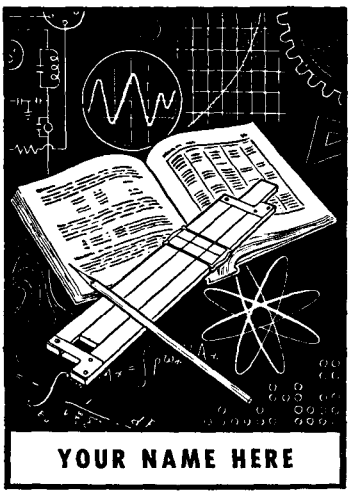
Their names are Larry Niven and Hayden Howard, both young Californians, both previously published in our companion magazine, *If* — where, as you may have noted, we have for some time been following a policy of introducing at least one brand-new-anywhere author in each issue. Niven is a graduate of this school; Howard's first appearance antedated it — but it is writers like these that we are looking for in doing this, and we're pleased to be able to say that we are finding them!

We think these two, in particular, are Going Somewhere. We certainly hope they'll be back with us in their travels — early, often and long!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

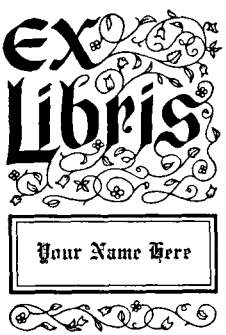
The BEMs in your neighborhood

won't run off with your books if you put inside the front cover of each book... a gummed bookplate with your name printed on it!



No. GF-614 by Emsh

No. GF-612 by Emsh



No. GM-12 by Cullen Rapp

No. GX-57 by Lynd Ward

FINAGLE SAYS—

The umpteenth corollary of Finagle's General Law of Dynamic Negatives says:

"No books are ever lost by loaning except ones you particularly want to keep."

100 for $4; 200, $6; 300, $8
with owner's name imprinted
All Postpaid. Add state sales tax, if any.

ACTUAL SIZE, all designs, 3x4 inches

The designs shown above are the only ones we offer!

Order from GALAXY **421 Hudson Street, New York 14, N. Y.**

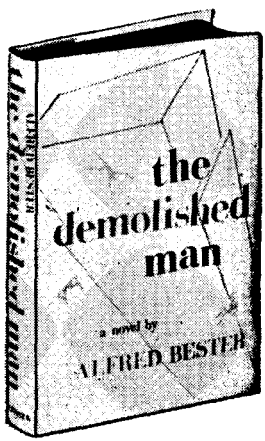
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BESTER'S BEST!

Have you read his famed THE DEMOLISHED MAN? Lived in its vividly real telepathic society, detailed so ingeniously and dramatically that, finishing the book, you'll find it hard to believe that society doesn't exist — yet!

By special arrangement with the publisher of THE DEMOLISHED MAN, we can offer you this magnificent book for $1.00, 2/3 off the regular price, plus 25¢ for postage and handling.

⅓ OF LIST PRICE



CASE BOUND $1.00

Supplies are limited! Send your order in immediately!

(Use Coupon or Separate Sheet)

GALAXY PUBLISHING CORP.

Please rush me ☐ copies of THE DEMOLISHED MAN

421 Hudson St. New York 14, N. Y.

THE DEMOLISHED MAN *The Original* Edition — Complete! Not A Low Cost Reprint — Yet Yours For Only $1.00! Plus Postage 25¢

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____

I Enclose_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED